

**Questions and Answers**  
**Testing of dental patients at Bowen, Collinsville and Ayr Hospitals**  
**for HIV**

On the 23 August 2006, Queensland Health was advised of a public dentist employed at Bowen, Collinsville and for a few sessions at Ayr Hospital who had tested positive for HIV.

**What is the risk?**

Expert advice from medical and public health specialists indicate the risk to any patients is extremely low. There have been no documented cases of HIV transmission from dentists to patients in Australia and stringent infection control and hygiene practices are standard in all Queensland Health facilities.

Queensland Health has been advised by both supervisors and patients that the dentist strictly adhered to infection control procedures.

**Who should be tested?**

Queensland Health has reviewed the records of all people treated by the dentist.

As a precaution, we are advising 549 patients treated by the public health dentist in Bowen, Collinsville or Ayr Hospitals, since 15 December 2005, to be tested for HIV.

Up to 30 school children have been identified as having been treated by the dentist during this time period. They are being followed up by Queensland Health and offered testing. Most procedures in the school dental system are undertaken by dental therapists.

**Are children more at risk than adults?**

No. The risk to any patient treated by the dentist is extremely low.

**What does the testing involve?**

Trained Queensland Health staff will take a small quantity of blood from the person's arm using a needle and syringe. Advice and counselling will also be provided by experienced public health staff.

**How long will I have to wait for results?**

Test results will be available within 48 hours. Advice on how to obtain results will be provided at the time of testing.

### **Is a blood test the only way to check for HIV?**

Yes, a blood test is the only way to test for the HIV virus.

### **Will I need any further testing?**

Some people who were treated by the dentist will also require a follow-up blood test. This test should occur three months after the date of their last dental treatment.

This is because it can take up to three months to detect evidence of HIV infection in the blood. This is called the “window period”.

People requiring follow up blood testing should seek advice at the time of testing about whether they need to take any precautions while waiting for test results (eg. safe sex or blood donation).

### **Where can I get more information about HIV?**

A 24-hour information line (1800 427 799) to assist concerned former patients has been established. Further information, including a HIV fact sheet, is also available on the Queensland Health website at [www.health.qld.gov.au](http://www.health.qld.gov.au)

### **How is HIV spread?**

HIV may be transmitted when blood, semen or vaginal fluid from an infected person enters the body of an uninfected person.

This most commonly occurs through sex or sharing needles or injecting equipment.

Mothers who are HIV positive can transmit the virus to their babies during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding.

HIV can also be transmitted through donated blood and blood products. However all blood, organs, tissues and semen donated in Australia are screened for HIV. The risk of getting HIV from these products in Australia is negligible.

There have been no documented cases of HIV transmission from dentists to patients in Australia.

### **What action is Queensland Health taking?**

Queensland Health has reviewed the records of all people treated by the dentist since 15 December 2005 and is contacting them to ensure they have been tested.

The Dental Board has also been informed.

Relief is being arranged for dental services for the area.

Queensland Health will continue to share information and provide advice to the community.