HIV Clinic
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Nova Scotia Health Authority’s (NSHA) HIV Clinic is committed to excellence in patient care, education, and applied clinical research.

Our goals are:

1. To provide services for people living with HIV, including:
   › patient care
   › teaching and research designed to prevent the spread of HIV and to help manage symptoms
   › interdisciplinary team support for the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs of people living with HIV

2. To make new medications and research studies available to Nova Scotians living with HIV.

3. To work with other clinics, community doctors, nurse practitioners, and organizations to provide care for people living with HIV.
Who are the Clinic team members?

• At your first appointment, you will meet a Clinic nurse and doctor. You will meet most of the other team members over time. These team members include a booking clerk, a clinic aide, a dietitian, a pharmacist, a psychologist, research assistants, and a social worker.

• The HIV Clinic is part of a teaching hospital, the QEII Health Sciences Centre. Learners (medical students and residents, nursing students, pharmacy residents, and psychology interns) are important members of our team. They may be involved in your care, working under the supervision of a doctor or Clinic staff member. We appreciate that you let them take part in your care.
Confidentiality

• Clinic staff will always respect your privacy. Every NSHA employee signs the following Pledge of Confidentiality:

  › www.nshealth.ca/sites/nshealth.ca/files/newhireresource_q_pledge_of_confidentiality.pdf

• Please note that our waiting areas are not private. You may see people you know in the waiting areas or other parts of the hospital. If you see someone you know, it is important to remember that confidentiality is also your responsibility. If you have any concerns, please talk with Clinic staff.

What will happen at my first appointment?

• Please allow at least 90 minutes for your first appointment.

• Staff will take a complete history and physical examination, and you will probably have blood drawn for testing.

• The nurse and doctor will talk with you about managing your HIV, and preventing its spread.
Blood tests

• At your first appointment, about 10 tubes of blood will be taken from one needle puncture. At each followup appointment, you will usually have 3-5 tubes of blood taken.

• Blood Collection is on the main floor, in the corridor between the Dickson Building and the Victoria Building. You can only have blood drawn there on the days when you have a Clinic appointment.

• To have blood work done on days when you don’t have a Clinic appointment, you can go to any of the other NSHA Blood Collection locations throughout the province.

• Tests will not be repeated if your family doctor has already ordered them.

• Blood tests for the following infections are often ordered at your first appointment, because these infections are often seen in people with HIV:
  › hepatitis A, B, and C
  › syphilis
  › chickenpox
  › toxoplasmosis
• Do not have blood work done on Fridays, weekends, or on the day before a holiday. The lab will not be able to process T Cell subsets on those days.
  › T Cell subsets (CD4 cells) measure the effect that HIV is having on your immune system. Viral load testing measures the amount of HIV in your blood. These tests help to determine your treatment and next steps.
  › If the results of these tests are not available at your appointment, you can call the Clinic nurse at 902-473-2647 in 2-3 weeks to get the results.

• The Clinic will send a letter to your family doctor or nurse practitioner after each appointment to keep them up to date about your HIV management. Your family doctor or nurse practitioner is responsible for your care between Clinic visits. They can contact the Clinic for advice, if needed.
Followup appointments

- How often you visit the Clinic will depend on how healthy you are and whether you are going to start taking new medications.

- Most patients are seen every 5-10 months, but some patients are seen more often.

- Your followup appointments may be with the nurse, pharmacist, and/or doctor. You will be assessed by the doctor at least once each year.

- Clinic staff will book a followup appointment for you. If you do not receive an appointment within the expected time (this is usually within 6 weeks of starting or changing ART medication, or within 10 months for a routine followup appointment), please call the booking clerk at 902-473-6592.

- Followup appointments are usually shorter than your first appointment (about 30-45 minutes).

Appointment times

- We do our best to see you at your scheduled appointment time. However, this is not always possible. We apologize for any delays.
• You can help us stay on schedule by being on time for your appointments. Please give 24-48 hours’ notice if you can’t keep an appointment. We can use this time to see a patient who needs to be seen urgently.

• If you miss 3 appointments in a row, your appointment will not be rebooked. You will be referred back to your family doctor or nurse practitioner.

Medications

• Medications used to treat HIV infection are called antiretroviral therapy (ART). In Nova Scotia, if ART is covered by a patient’s private insurance plan, it is dispensed by the community pharmacy.

• If there is a co-payment associated with the private plan, it will be covered by the High Cost Drug Program, with the exception of the $11.95 per prescription High Cost Drug Program user fee.

• If a patient does not have a private insurance plan, coverage is provided through the High Cost Drug Program, and ART is dispensed by the 6 North Pharmacy in the Victoria General Hospital. Patients without private insurance are responsible for paying a user fee of $11.95 per prescription.
• When you are started on ART or your ART medications are changed, you may receive medication education from the Clinic pharmacist in person or over the phone.

• The pharmacist (902-473-6829) can answer any questions you have about your ART medications. If you have questions about your other medications, including over-the-counter products, ask your community pharmacist.

• It is important that your pharmacy knows what ART medications you are taking. Some medications can interact with ART medications and make them not work as well or raise the chance of side effects. Side effects may be serious. Always ask your community pharmacist to check for interactions with your ART medications before starting a new medication, over-the-counter product, vitamin, or natural health product.

• If you get ART from the 6 North Pharmacy, Clinic staff will update the provincial drug information system (DIS) with this information, unless you direct us not to in writing.

• You must visit the Clinic at least once a year to renew your ART prescriptions. Otherwise, you may run out of your HIV medications.
What if I have a problem between Clinic appointments?

- First, call your family doctor or nurse practitioner.
- If it is from Monday-Thursday and you think the problem is related to your HIV or one of your HIV medications, call the Clinic at 902-473-2647 and leave a message. We will return your call later that day or on the next working day.
- If it is an emergency, go to the nearest Emergency Department.

Who do I call if I have questions?

- If you have questions about your appointment, call 902-473-6592.
- If you have questions about your test results, call 902-473-2647.
- If you do not have a private insurance plan and need to refill your HIV medications, call the 6 North Pharmacy at 902-473-7986.
Admission to hospital

• If you need to be admitted to the hospital, bring all of your medications with you. Hospital staff will need to know about all of the medications that you are taking, including over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and natural health products.

• It is important to tell a member of your health care team if you have had any allergic reactions or side effects to any medications.

Psychological, spiritual, financial, and educational support

• After an HIV diagnosis, you may feel stress, anxiety, confusion, fear, or hopelessness. **This is completely normal.** These feelings may continue for weeks or months, and may interfere with your work and relationships.

• There are many resources available to you, including psychologists, social workers, spiritual care, and community organizations. Please ask a Clinic staff member for more information.

• You may wish to talk with someone who has HIV. If so, please ask a Clinic staff member to help you contact a peer support person.
Research
The HIV Clinic is committed to improving the quality and length of life of Nova Scotians living with HIV. You may be invited to take part in a clinical trial. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose not to take part or decide to withdraw from a study, your care will not be affected.

Some helpful hints for dealing with HIV that have worked for others:
• Learn about the disease and how you can maintain your health. There are pamphlets about HIV in the Clinic. There is a lot of information about HIV infection in the media, on the Internet, and in books. Some of the information may not be correct or up to date. If you have questions about something you read, bring it with you to the Clinic. We will go over it with you and try to answer your questions. One of the best sources for information is CATIE at www.catie.ca
• Give yourself time and do not do anything impulsive. If you feel overwhelmed, reach out to someone you trust and ask them to just listen. This may be a close friend, someone from the Clinic, or a service provider from the hospital, such as a counsellor or spiritual support, or someone from a community agency.

• Your health is private. At first, your caregivers, close friends, and support people will likely provide you with the most help. Give yourself time to gather information and develop a plan for how to live with HIV before telling people outside of your support system.

• Do not change or quit your job without examining all of the options, and planning for your financial needs.

• Drinking too much or using drugs is harmful to your health. If you need help with alcohol or drug use, ask your family doctor or a Clinic staff member.

• Make sure to get enough sleep and eat healthy meals.

• Consider joining a support group.

• Explore techniques for stress reduction, relaxation, and visualization.

Please feel free to call the HIV Clinic nurse at 902-473-2647 with any questions or concerns.
QEII Health Sciences Centre
is made up of 10 buildings located on two sites

**Halifax Infirmary Site**
1a. Halifax Infirmary
1b. Emergency Dept.
2. Abbie J. Lane Memorial Building
3. Camp Hill Veterans’ Memorial Building

**VG Site**
4. Nova Scotia Rehabilitation Centre
5. Bethune Building
6. Mackenzie Building Laboratories
7. Centre for Clinical Research
8. Dickson Building
9. Victoria Building
10. Centennial Building

- Patient Parking
- Entrance Doors

*Please do not wear scented products when you come to the QEII.*
Looking for more health information?
Find this pamphlet and all our patient resources here: http://library.nshealth.ca/PatientGuides
Contact your local public library for books, videos, magazines, and other resources.
For more information, go to http://library.novascotia.ca
Connect with a registered nurse in Nova Scotia any time: call 811 or visit https://811.novascotia.ca
Learn about other programs and services in your community: call 211 or visit http://ns.211.ca

Nova Scotia Health Authority promotes a smoke-free, vape-free, and scent-free environment.
Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!
www.nshealth.ca

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The information is not intended to be and does not constitute health care or medical advice.
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The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.