



Patient & Family Guide

2024

HIV Clinic

Victoria General Site,
QE II



www.nshealth.ca

HIV Clinic

- The QE II's HIV Clinic supports patient care, education, and research.
- Our goals are:
 - › To offer patient care for people living with HIV
 - › To offer education to stop the spread of HIV
 - › To offer help with symptoms
 - › To offer physical, emotional, and social support for people living with HIV
 - › To give access to new medications and the option to take part in research studies

Who are the Clinic team members?

- At your first appointment, you will meet a Clinic nurse and doctor. Other team members you may meet include:
 - › Booking clerk
 - › Clinic aide
 - › Dietitian
 - › Pharmacist
 - › Psychologist
 - › Research assistants
 - › Social worker

- The HIV Clinic is part of the QE II teaching hospital. Students and learners (like medical students and residents, nursing students, pharmacy residents, and psychology interns) are key members of the Clinic team. They may take part in your care under the direction of your health care team. We thank you for letting them take part in your care.

Privacy

- Your health care team will respect your privacy and protect your personal health information. Every Nova Scotia Health employee must sign a Pledge of Confidentiality.
- You can read the full Pledge of Confidentiality here:
 - › www.nshealth.ca/documents-and-reports/pledge-confidentiality



- Our waiting areas are **not** private. You may see people you know in the waiting areas or in other parts of the hospital. **If you see someone you know, respect their privacy.**

- If you have any concerns about privacy, talk to a member of your health care team.

What will happen at my first appointment?

- Plan to be at the Clinic for at least 90 minutes (1 ½ hours).
- A member of your health care team will ask questions about your medical history, do a physical exam, and order blood tests, if needed.
- The nurse and doctor will talk with you about managing your HIV, and how to stop its spread to others.

Blood tests

- At your first appointment, about 10 tubes of blood will be taken from 1 needle. At each follow-up appointment, you will usually have 3 to 5 tubes of blood taken.

- Some infections are more common in people with HIV. You will likely have blood taken to test for these infections at your first appointment:
 - › Hepatitis A, B, and C
 - › Syphilis
 - › Chickenpox
 - › Toxoplasmosis
- We will not repeat any tests that your primary health care provider (family doctor or nurse practitioner) has already ordered.
- T-Cell subset (CD4 cells) blood tests measure what HIV is doing to your immune system.
- Viral load blood testing measures the amount of HIV in your blood. These tests help us to plan your treatment and next steps.
- If the results of these tests are not given to you at your appointment, you can call the Clinic nurse in 2 to 3 weeks to get the results:
 - › Phone: 902-473-2647
- The Clinic will send a letter to your primary health care provider after each appointment to keep them up to date about your HIV management. Your primary health care provider is in charge of your care between Clinic visits. They can contact the Clinic for advice, if needed.

- Blood Collection is on the main floor of the Victoria General site, in the hall between the Dickson Building and the Victoria Building. **You can only have blood work done there on the days when you have a Clinic appointment.**

- To have blood work done on days when you **do not** have a Clinic appointment, you can make an appointment at your closest blood collection location:
 - › www.nshealth.ca/laboratory-services/blood-collection

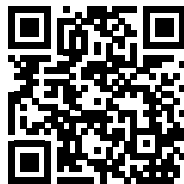


Do not have blood work done on:

- › **Fridays**
- › **Weekends**
- › **The day before a holiday**

The lab will not be able to process T-Cell subsets on these days.

- You may also download and use the YourHealthNS app on your smartphone to book blood work appointments. You can also use the app to:
 - › Book X-rays, flu shots, and vaccines
 - › Get a free, same-day virtual appointment with a health care provider
 - › Find services and see wait times
 - › Find health information and resources for different topics (like chronic pain, parenting, and mental health)
 - › Chat with a care navigator to help you find the best services and the most reliable information
- You can download the app here:
 - › www.yourhealthns.ca



- To give feedback to help improve the app, visit:
 - › www.nshealth.ca/yourhealthns-feedback

Follow-up appointments

- How often you visit the Clinic for follow-up appointments will depend on:
 - › Your health
 - › If you are starting new medications
- Most people visit the Clinic every 10 to 12 months.
- Your follow-up appointments may be with the nurse, pharmacist, or doctor. **You will see the doctor at least 1 time each year.**
- A follow-up appointment will be booked for you if, or when, you are prescribed antiretroviral therapy (ART) medication (see page 7). Call 902-473-7669 to talk to the booking clerk if:
 - › you **do not** get an appointment within 6 weeks of starting or changing ART medication.
 - › you **do not** get an appointment within 10 months for routine follow-up.
- Follow-up appointments are usually shorter than your first appointment. They will take about 30 to 45 minutes.

Appointment times

- We do our best to see you at your booked appointment time. This is not always possible. Help us stay on schedule by being on time for your appointments.

If you need to cancel or reschedule your appointment:

- **Call 902-473-7669 at least 48 hours (2 days) before your appointment.** We can use this time to see another patient.
- **If you miss 3 appointments in a row, your appointment will not be rebooked.** We will refer you back to your primary health care provider.

ART (antiretroviral therapy) medication

- ART medication is used to treat HIV.

If you have a private insurance plan:

- Call your insurance provider to check if ART is covered by your insurance plan.
 - › If it is covered, you can fill your prescription at any pharmacy.
 - › If it is not covered or it does not cover the entire cost, the remainder may be covered by Nova Scotia Pharmacare.

- You may still need to pay a user fee every time you fill a prescription.
- To learn more about the Nova Scotia Pharmacare Plan, visit:
 - › <https://novascotia.ca/dhw/pharmacare/family-pharmacare.asp>



If you do not have a private insurance plan:

- If you have a Nova Scotia Health Card, ART medication is covered by Nova Scotia Pharmacare. **You must fill your prescription at the 6 North Pharmacy location on the 6th floor of the Victoria Building at the QE II Victoria General site.**
- You may need to pay a user fee every time you fill a prescription.
- If you get your ART medications from the 6 North Pharmacy, a record of your medications will be added to the Nova Scotia Drug Information System (DIS).

- This system has information about the prescriptions you have had filled and other information like:
 - › Your medical conditions
 - › Your allergies
- Health care providers in the hospital or in your community can add information about your medications to your record. They can also look at it to make better decisions about your care.
- If you have questions about privacy, or if you want to limit access to your information in the DIS, call the Nova Scotia Department of Health Privacy and Access Office:
 - › Phone (toll-free): 1-855-640-4765
- If you are starting or changing ART medications, you can talk with the Clinic pharmacist in person or on the phone to learn about these medications.

Clinic pharmacist:

- › Phone: 902-473-5538
- The Clinic pharmacist can only answer questions about your ART medication. If you have questions about your other medications (including over-the-counter medications), talk with your community pharmacist or your primary health care provider.

- **Always tell your community pharmacist and other health care providers what ART medications you are taking.** Some medications can make ART medications not work as well, or raise the chance of side effects. **Side effects can be serious.**
- **Always ask your community pharmacist to check your ART medications before you start taking a new prescription or an over-the-counter medication (including vitamins or natural health products).**

What if I have a problem between Clinic appointments?

- First, call your primary health care provider.
- If you think the problem is related to your HIV, call the Clinic and leave a message:
 - › Phone: 902-473-2647 (Monday to Thursday)
We will return your call later that day or on the next working day.
- If your question is related to your medications, call the 6 North Pharmacy or the Clinic pharmacist (Monday to Friday):
 - › Phone: 902-473-5538

If it is an emergency, go to the nearest Emergency Department right away.

Who do I call if I have questions?

- If you have questions about your **appointment**, call the booking clerk:
 - › Phone: 902-473-7669
- If you have questions about your **test results**, call the Clinic:
 - › Phone: 902-473-2647
- If you do not have a private insurance plan and need to refill your **ART medications**, call the 6 North Pharmacy:
 - › Phone: 902-473-7986

What do I do if I have to go to the hospital?

- Bring all of your medications (including over-the-counter medications, vitamins, and natural health products) with you in their original labelled containers, if:
 - › You have an appointment at a hospital
 - › You know you will be admitted to the hospital
- Your health care team needs to know about all of the medications that you are taking.

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.

Support and resources

- After an HIV diagnosis, you may feel stressed, anxious, confused, scared, or hopeless. This is common.
- You may have these feelings for weeks or months. They may affect your work, your relationships, or other areas of your life.
- There are many resources and supports available at the hospital and in the community. These include:
 - › Mental health support
 - › Spiritual care
 - › Social workers
 - › Financial support
 - › Education resources
 - › Community organizations
- Please ask a Clinic staff member to refer you to the Clinic's social worker.
- You may wish to talk with someone else who has HIV. If so, ask a Clinic staff member to help you contact a peer support person.

Helpful hints for coping with HIV

- Learn about HIV and how you can stay healthy. There are pamphlets about HIV in the Clinic.
- There is a lot of information about HIV in the media in books, and online. Some of the information may not be correct or up to date. If you have questions about something you heard or read, bring it with you to the Clinic. We will go over it with you and try to answer your questions.
- Give yourself time. **Do not** do anything without thinking it through. **Do not** change or quit your job without thinking about all of your options and planning for your financial needs. Talk to the Clinic's social worker.
- 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 (like a counsellor or spiritual services), the Clinic social worker, or someone from a community organization.

- **Your health information is private.** At first, your caregivers, close friends, and support persons will likely give you the most help. You may need to find information and make a plan for how to live with HIV before telling people outside of your support system. Give yourself time to do this. If you want to tell other people about your health, you can do it when you feel ready.
- For health information you can trust, visit:

Community AIDS Treatment Information Exchange (CATIE):

- › www.catie.ca

Alcohol or drug use

- Alcohol and other drugs can affect how your HIV medications work. Talk to your primary health care provider, Clinic staff member, or your pharmacist about this.
 - › Please talk with your primary health care provider or with Clinic staff if you would like more information about how alcohol and drugs can affect your health, or if you want help stopping or cutting back.
- Try to get enough sleep and eat healthy meals.
- Think about joining a support group.

- Explore ways to help you lower stress (like relaxation techniques, mindfulness, meditation, visualization, or yoga).
- **Please call the HIV Clinic nurse with any questions or concerns.**
 - › **Phone: 902-473-2647**

Research

- The HIV Clinic works to improve the lives of Nova Scotians with HIV by leading clinical research projects.
- You may be asked to take part in a clinical trial. You do not have to. You will have the same care whether or not you choose to take part.

What are your questions?

Please ask a member of your health care team. We are here to help you.

QEII Health Sciences Centre

is made up of 10 buildings located on two sites

