



Patient & Family Guide  
2021

# HIV Clinic

QEII



[www.nshealth.ca](http://www.nshealth.ca)

# HIV Clinic: QEII

The QEII's HIV Clinic supports patient care, education, and clinical research.

Our goals are:

1. To offer services for people living with HIV, such as:
  - › Patient care
  - › Education to stop the spread of HIV and to help with symptoms
  - › Support for the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual needs of people living with HIV
2. To give Nova Scotians living with HIV access to new medications and research studies.
3. To work with other clinics, community doctors, nurse practitioners, and organizations to offer care for people living with HIV.

## 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 QEII teaching hospital. Learners (such as medical students and residents, nursing students, pharmacy residents, and psychology interns) are key members of the team. They may be included in your care, working under the direction of a doctor or Clinic staff member. We thank you for letting them take part in your care.

## **Confidentiality**

- Clinic staff will always respect your privacy. Every Nova Scotia Health employee signs the following *Pledge of Confidentiality*:
  - › [www.nshealth.ca/sites/nshealth.ca/files/newhireresource\\_q\\_pledge\\_of\\_confidentiality.pdf](http://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, remember to respect their confidentiality as well. If you have any concerns, please talk with Clinic staff.

## **What will happen at my first appointment?**

- You should plan to be at the Clinic for at least 90 minutes (1 ½ hours).

- Staff will take a complete history, do a physical exam, and order any blood tests needed that have not already been done.
- The nurse and doctor will talk with you about managing your HIV, and stopping its spread.

## **Blood tests**

- At your first appointment, about 10 tubes of blood will be taken from one needle. At each follow-up appointment, you will usually have 3 to 5 tubes of blood taken.
- Blood Collection is on the main floor of the QEII, 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 to go to any blood collection location in the province:
  - › [www.nshealth.ca/blood-collection?title=&field\\_location\\_zones\\_tid=All](http://www.nshealth.ca/blood-collection?title=&field_location_zones_tid=All)
- We will not repeat any tests that your primary health care provider has already ordered.
- Some infections are more common in people with HIV. Blood tests for these infections will likely be ordered at your first appointment:
  - › 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 what HIV is doing to your immune system. Viral load 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.

## **Follow-up appointments**

- When you visit the Clinic will depend on how healthy you are and if you will be starting new medication(s).
- Most patients are seen every 5 to 10 months, but some patients are seen more often.

- Your follow-up appointments may be with the nurse, pharmacist, and/or doctor. You will be seen by the doctor at least once each year.
- A follow-up appointment will be booked for you if/when you are prescribed antiretroviral therapy (ART) medication. Call the booking clerk at 902-473-7669 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 (about 30 to 45 minutes).

## **Appointment times**

- We do our best to see you at your booked appointment time. This is not always possible. We are sorry for any delays.
- You can help us stay on schedule by being on time for your appointments. Please give 48 hours (2 days) notice if you cannot make it to an appointment. We can use this time to see another patient.
- **If you miss 3 appointments in a row, your appointment will not be rebooked.** You will be directed back to your primary health care provider.

## ART medication

- ART medication is used to treat HIV. In Nova Scotia, if ART is covered by your private insurance plan, you can fill your prescription at any pharmacy.
- If your private insurance plan has a co-payment, it will be covered by the Nova Scotia Family Pharmacare Program (previously called the High Cost Drug Program). **Note:** You may need to pay a user fee every time you fill a prescription.
- If you do not have a private insurance plan, coverage is offered by the Nova Scotia Family Pharmacare Program. You must fill your prescription at the 6 North Pharmacy in the QEII, Victoria General site. You may need to pay a user fee every time you fill a prescription. For information about the Nova Scotia Family Pharmacare Program, visit:
  - › <https://novascotia.ca/dhw/pharmacare>
- When you start or change ART medication(s), you can learn about the medication(s) from our Clinic pharmacist, in person, or over the phone.
- The pharmacist can only answer questions about your ART medication(s).
  - › Phone: 902-473-6829

- › If you have questions about your other medication(s), including over-the-counter products, talk with your community pharmacist.
- **You should always tell your community pharmacist what ART medication(s) you are taking.** Some medications can interact with ART medication(s) and make them not work as well or increase the chance of side effects. **Side effects may be serious.** Always ask your community pharmacist to check your ART medications before starting a new medication, over-the-counter product, vitamin, or natural health product.
- If you get your ART medication(s) from the 6 North Pharmacy, a record of your medication(s) will be added to the Nova Scotia Drug Information System (DIS). If you have questions about confidentiality, or if you wish to limit access to your information on the DIS, call the Nova Scotia Department of Health Privacy and Access Office:
  - › Phone (toll-free): 1-855-640-4765
- **You must complete your tests and visit the Clinic at least once a year to renew your ART prescription. Otherwise, you may run out of your medication(s).**



## 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 or one of your HIV medications:
  - › Monday to Thursday, 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 902-473-7669.
- 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 **ART medication(s)**, call the 6 North Pharmacy at 902-473-7986.

## Going to the hospital

- If you have an appointment at or will be admitted to a hospital, bring all of your medications with you in their original, labelled containers. Hospital staff will need to know about all of the medications that you are taking, including over-the-counter products, 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 medication(s).**

## Psychological, spiritual, financial, and educational support

- After an HIV diagnosis, you may feel stressed, anxious, confused, scared, or hopeless. **This is completely normal.** You may have these feelings for weeks or months, and they may affect your work, relationships, or other areas of your life.
- There are many resources available, 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 else who has HIV. If so, please ask a Clinic staff member to help you contact a peer support person.

## **Research**

The HIV Clinic works to improve the lives of Nova Scotians with HIV. You may be invited to take part in a clinical trial. Whether or not you take part is up to you. If you choose not to take part or want to withdraw from a study, it will not affect your care.

## **Helpful hints for coping with HIV that have worked for others:**

- Learn about the disease 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, 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 heard or 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 – Canada’s source for HIV and hepatitis C information:
  - › [www.catie.ca](http://www.catie.ca)

- Give yourself time — do not do anything without thinking it through. 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 information is private.** At first, your caregivers, close friends, and support people will likely give you the most help. Give yourself time to find information and make a plan for how to live with HIV before telling people outside of your support system.
- Do not change or quit your job without thinking about 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 primary health care provider or a Clinic staff member.
- Try to get enough sleep and eat healthy meals.
- Consider joining a support group.
- Explore ways to help you lower stress such as relaxation techniques, mindfulness, or visualization.

**Please call the HIV Clinic nurse with any questions or concerns.**

› **Phone: 902-473-2647**

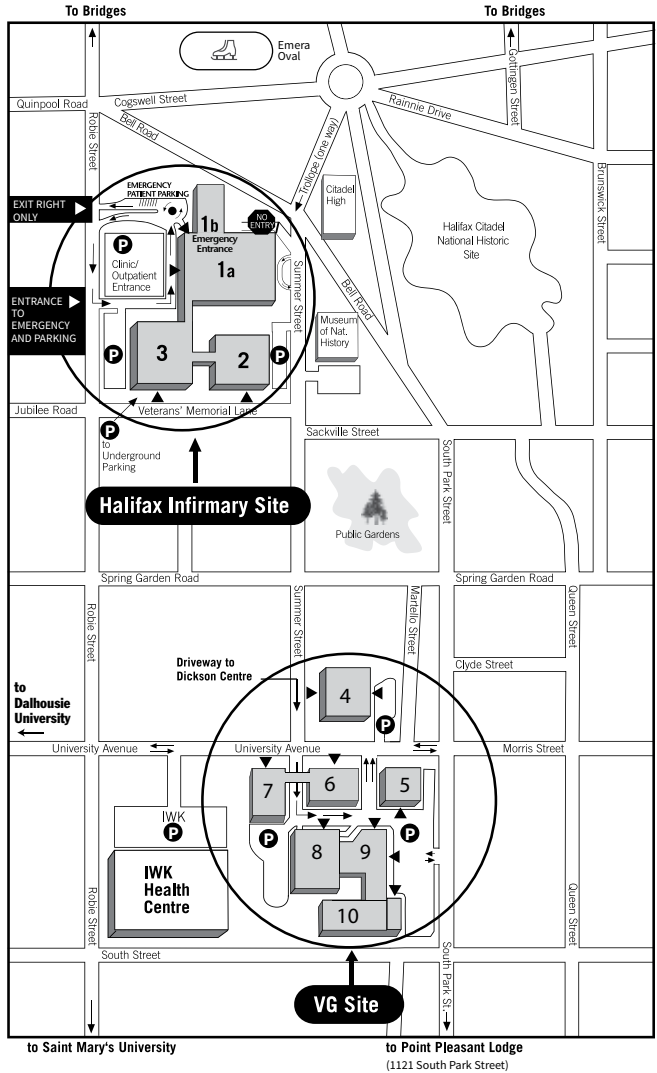
# QEII Health Sciences Centre

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                   |

- P** 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: <https://library.nshealth.ca/PatientEducation>

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 promotes a smoke-free, vape-free, and scent-free environment.*

*Please do not use perfumed products. Thank you!*

[www.nshealth.ca](http://www.nshealth.ca)

*Prepared by: HIV Clinic Staff, QEII*

*Designed by: Nova Scotia Health Library Services*

The information in this brochure is for informational and educational purposes only.

The information is not intended to be and does not constitute health care or medical advice.

If you have any questions, please ask your health care provider.

WC85-0430 © June 2021 Nova Scotia Health Authority

The information in this pamphlet is to be updated every 3 years or as needed.