

## Mental Health Screening: A Quick Reference Guide for HIV Primary Care Clinicians

Mental health problems are common in the general population. People with HIV are even more likely to experience emotional distress or mental health disorders. Depression, anxiety, PTSD, and cognitive impairment are among the most common disorders. Psychosis is more common among patients with HIV who abuse substances, particularly stimulants, than in the general population. Any change in mental status should prompt consideration of a significant medical complication before determining that the cause is solely psychiatric.

### Mental Health Screening

Screen all HIV-infected patients for mental health disorders at baseline and annually. Assess the following:

- Cognitive impairment
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Sleep habits and appetite
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Psychosocial status
- Past psychiatric history including psychotropic medications
- Alcohol and substance use
- Suicidal/violent ideation

For a list of mental health screening tools, visit the HIV Clinical Resources website: [www.hivguidelines.org](http://www.hivguidelines.org).

The primary care clinician should use the questions below to determine whether a thorough examination for mental health disorders by the primary care clinician or referral to a mental health professional is required.

### Questions to Identify Cognitive Impairment<sup>1</sup>

- Have you had difficulty reasoning and solving problems?
- Have you forgotten things that have happened recently?
- Have you had trouble keeping your attention on any activity for long?
- Have you had difficulty doing activities involving concentration and thinking?

### Questions to Identify Depression<sup>2</sup>

During the past month:

- Have you experienced little interest or pleasure in doing things?
- Have you felt down, depressed, or hopeless?

### Questions to Identify Anxiety

- Do you often worry or feel nervous?
- Are you often fearful of interacting with other people?
- Do you ever feel jittery, short of breath, or like your heart is racing?
- Do you ever feel as if you might lose control or fear that you may be “losing it”?

### Questions to Identify Sleep and Appetite Problems

- Do you have problems either falling asleep or staying asleep?
- Do you have problems with either eating too much or too little?

### Questions to Identify Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

In your life, have you ever had any experience that was so upsetting, frightening, or horrible that you:

- Have nightmares about it or think about it when you do not want to?
- Try hard not to think about it or go out of your way to avoid situations that remind you of it?
- Are constantly on guard, watchful, or easily startled?
- Feel numb or detached from others, activities, or your surroundings?

### Questions to Determine Psychosocial Status

- Where do you live?...How long have you lived there?
- Where do you work?...How long have you worked there?
- Do you have contact with family and friends?
- Do you have a partner?
- Do you feel safe in your current relationship?

### Elements of Past Psychiatric History

- Mental health diagnoses
- Psychotropic medications
- Past psychiatric hospitalizations
- Contact information for mental health clinicians if applicable

### Triggers That May Exacerbate Mental Distress for People With HIV

- Learning of HIV-positive status
- Disclosure of HIV status to family and friends
- Introduction of medication
- Physical illness; new symptoms of disease; disease progression; AIDS diagnosis
- Hospitalization (particularly first hospitalization)
- Death of a significant other
- Lifestyle changes (e.g., loss of job, end of relationship, relocation)
- Necessity of making end-of-life and permanency planning decisions

### Alcohol and Substance Use

#### Questions to Assess for Substance Use

- Have you ever used any street drugs such as heroin, methamphetamine, ecstasy/MDMA, cocaine, crack, or marijuana?
- When was the last time?
- Are you interested now in any substance use services or treatment?

If the patient has a history of substance abuse, proceed with further evaluation and referral to treatment program or mental health specialist.

#### Questions to Assess for Alcohol Use

There are several tools available to screen for alcohol use. One simple and effective tool for identifying present or past use is the **CAGE** questionnaire. If the patient answers “yes” to two or more questions, it is suggestive of a problem, and the clinician should offer referral to appropriate services and should re-evaluate alcohol use at least quarterly.

- Have you ever felt that you should **CUT DOWN** on your drinking?
- Have people **ANNOYED** you by criticizing your drinking?
- Have you ever felt bad or **GUILTY** about your drinking?
- Have you ever had a drink first thing in the morning (an **EYE OPENER**) to steady your nerves or to get rid of a hangover?

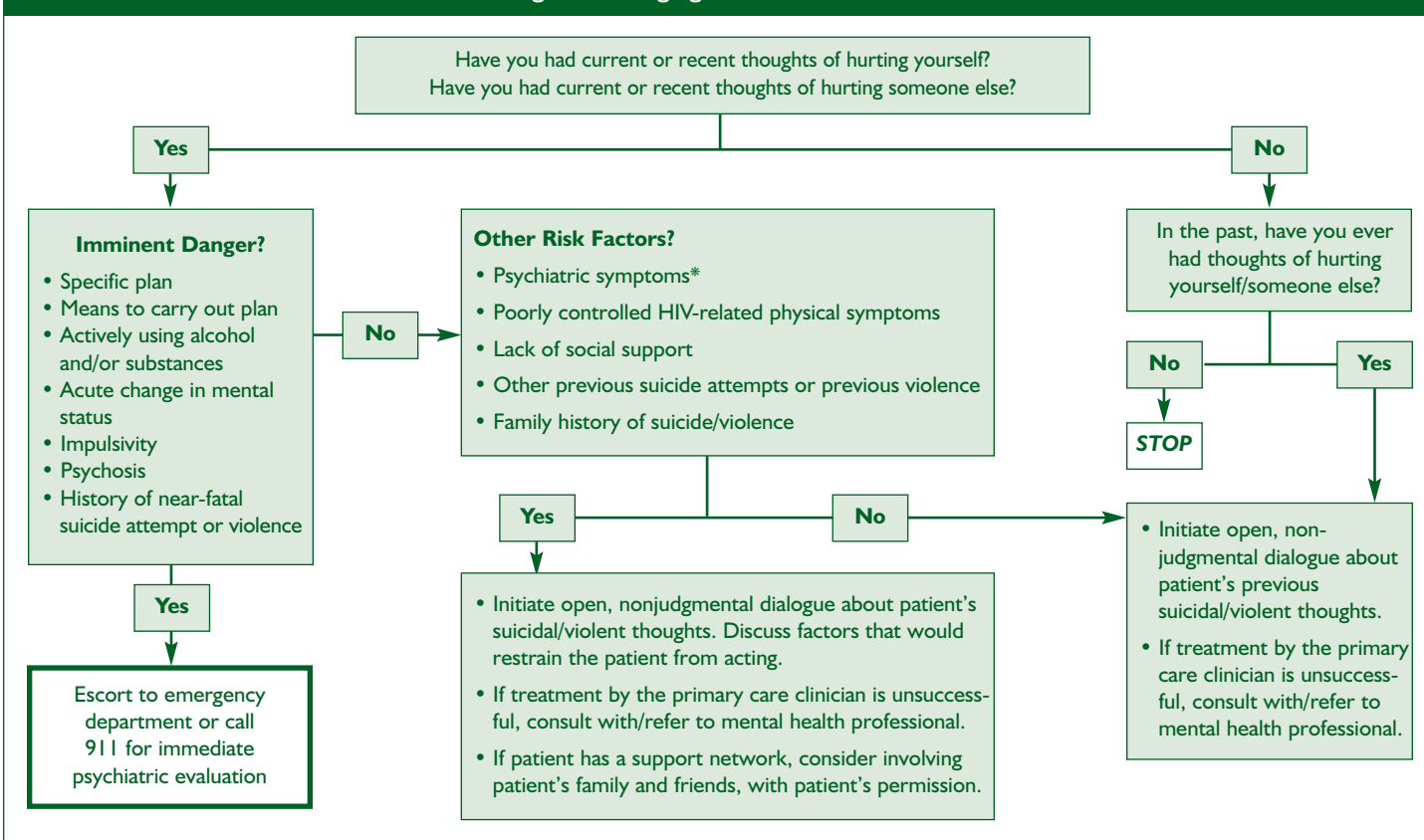
#### Additional Screening Tools

These tools were developed by the World Health Organization ([www.who.int/substance\\_abuse](http://www.who.int/substance_abuse)).

- AUDIT (Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test)
- ASSIST (Alcohol, Smoking, and Substance Involvement Screening Test)

For additional information on alcohol and substance use among HIV-infected patients, refer to [www.hivguidelines.org](http://www.hivguidelines.org).

## Screening and Managing Suicidal or Violent Patients



\* Psychiatric symptoms such as depression, hopelessness, or agitation.

## When to Refer to a Mental Health Professional (Psychiatrist, Psychologist, Clinical Social Worker, Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner)

### Emergent:

- Risk of violence to self or others (suicidal/violent ideation)
- Acute psychosis – general medical disorders should be excluded

### Non-emergent:

- Delusions
- Hallucinations
- Grandiosity/flight of ideas/loose association/disordered thinking
- Inadequate response to medication/treatment
- Relapse of psychiatric symptoms while on treatment
- Active substance abuse or relapse to substance use with mental health disorder (refer to program for dually diagnosed patients)

## Prescribing Considerations

Clinicians should refer to the full prescribing information for all medications their patients are taking and be knowledgeable about drug-drug interactions. Consultation with a psychiatrist experienced in the treatment of HIV-infected patients may be warranted.

For information on drug-drug interactions, go to:

### → HIV Clinical Guidelines for the Primary Care Practitioner: Mental Health Care for People With HIV Infection

[www.hivguidelines.org](http://www.hivguidelines.org)

### → American Psychiatric Association Practice Guideline for the Treatment of Patients With HIV/AIDS

[www.psych.org/aids/index.htm](http://www.psych.org/aids/index.htm)

### → AETC National Resource Center

<http://www.aids-etc.org/aidsetc?page=et-07-08>

## References

1. Knipples HM, Goodkin K, Weiss JJ, et al. The importance of cognitive self-report in early HIV-1 infection: Validation of a cognitive functional status subscale. *AIDS* 2002;16:259-267.

2. Arroll B, Khin N, Kerse N. Screening for depression in primary care using 2 verbally asked questions. *BMJ* 2003;327:1144-1146.

## Resources

→ **New York State Department of Health AIDS Institute**  
[www.hivguidelines.org](http://www.hivguidelines.org)

→ **New York State Office of Mental Health**  
1-800-597-8481 TDDY 1-800-597-9810  
[www.omh.state.ny.us](http://www.omh.state.ny.us)

→ **New York State Substance Abuse Hotline**  
1-800-522-5353  
[www.oasas.state.ny.us](http://www.oasas.state.ny.us)  
Provides information and referral for substance abuse problems throughout New York State

→ **LifeNet**  
1-800-LifeNet (1-800-543-3638)  
[www.mhaofnyc.org/2lifenet.html](http://www.mhaofnyc.org/2lifenet.html)  
Crisis management, information, and referral network in New York City for mental health and substance use problems. Clinically staffed 24 hours/7 days a week.

→ **New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene HIV/AIDS Hotline**  
1-800-TALK-HIV (1-800-825-5448)  
[www.nyc.gov/html/doh/home.html](http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/home.html)  
Monday - Saturday, 9 am - 9 pm

→ **American Psychiatric Association Practice Guideline for the Treatment of Patients With HIV/AIDS**  
[www.psych.org/aids/index.htm](http://www.psych.org/aids/index.htm)

→ **National Institute of Mental Health**  
[www.nimh.nih.gov](http://www.nimh.nih.gov)

→ **National Institutes on Drug Abuse**  
[www.nida.nih.gov](http://www.nida.nih.gov)

→ **National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism**  
[www.niaaa.nih.gov](http://www.niaaa.nih.gov)

→ **National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information**  
[www.health.org](http://www.health.org)

→ **World Health Organization Department of Mental Health and Substance Use**  
[www.who.int/mental\\_health](http://www.who.int/mental_health)  
[www.who.int/substance\\_abuse](http://www.who.int/substance_abuse)

For additional Mental Health resources within the New York State area and around the nation, refer to [www.hivguidelines.org](http://www.hivguidelines.org).