

You are part of the solution! Please keep up your efforts!

**We need Covid-19 response and testing for HIV, viral hepatitis and STIs
Integrate testing whenever possible**

“One thing we’ve learned from Covid-19: We are all one Europe, and we need to work together. Covid-19 is not going to go away. It will transition likely from pandemic to endemic. We will be needing a continuing Covid-19 response for the foreseeable future. At the same time, we will need to rebuild health services weakened by the Covid response and seriously plan for future health outbreaks.”

*Quote from Professor Michel Kazatchkine,
Special Advisor to the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS in Eastern Europe and Central Asia,
Member of The Independent Panel for Pandemic Preparedness and Response*

First, we thank the frontline workers, health services, testing services, and community organisations working so hard to respond to Covid-19 *and* maintain essential HIV, viral hepatitis and STI services. We honour and remember those who have died for their efforts.

Covid-19 response has drawn attention, staff, funding and resources from other health priorities, including HIV, viral hepatitis and STI response. In October 2020, UNAIDS reported “significant decreases in HIV testing services in nearly all countries with available data”. A number of surveys have reported similar trends across Europe.¹ While a number of countries have rebounded to pre-COVID-19 testing levels, in other countries, testing remains low.

This Spring European Testing Week we won’t be going back to “testing as usual”.

As Michel Kazatchkine says above, Covid-19 response will be essential for the foreseeable future. We will continue to need innovative ways – and funding – to adapt testing services for other infectious diseases. Many of you are doing that. Please see examples of innovation [here](#).

This is why it is particularly urgent that we unite now to raise awareness of the importance of ensuring access to testing as an essential health service, especially for marginalised and stigmatised populations such as sex workers, people who use drugs, LGBTQ+ and migrants who are often most at risk and most in need of targeted services.

“...the question in 2020 has to be what effect the pandemic will have had on testing by the end of 2021. For now, our message has to be to protect the progress of the last decade by continuing to prioritize HIV testing and getting treatment to those who need it. We cannot allow the pandemic to rob us of an AIDS-free future that is within our grasp.”

Quote from Dr Hans Kluge, WHO Regional Director for Europe

¹¹ Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on testing services for HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmitted infections in the WHO European Region, March to August 2020”:
<https://www.eurosurveillance.org/content/10.2807/1560-7917.ES.2020.25.47.2001943/>

You are part of the solution!

We recognise the struggles you have faced in adapting services in the new circumstances, with restrictions and people's fear of catching Covid-19 while attending services. During the Spring and Autumn ETW's in 2020, our webinars and online videos highlighted a number of innovations you have developed including telemedicine, online services, self-testing, open air testing, integrated testing etc. We encourage you to continue these great efforts.

- In times of limited resources for other health priorities and heightened competition between priority areas, *integrated* testing for HIV, HBV and HCV can be a way to reduce costs and improve early diagnosis for all three viruses, which have common modes of transmission and therefore overlaps in affected groups and high levels of co-infection.
- Combining HIV and viral hepatitis testing with Covid-19 testing can also be a way to encourage more people to test and to reduce cost.
- We recognise that many of you may not be able to provide testing services due to Covid-related restrictions. Instead, we encourage you to raise awareness of the importance of early testing and to advocate for continued access to early testing for HIV and viral hepatitis, especially for those most at risk.
- We recommend that organisations participating in ETW adapt and tailor their activities according to their capabilities and local considerations.

Join the campaign and take part in Spring Testing Week, 14-21 May 2021!

How will the 2021 Spring ETW work?

Due to the varying response levels and the changing epidemiological nature of the pandemic, we expect that ETW activities will be organised differently from country to country. Organisations that are capable of coordinating in-person activities should ensure safety precautions are in place, in accordance with recommendations from national/local health authorities.

We invite you to keep sharing how you have adapted and maintained your services, whether through online, in-person, or a combination of both!

The ETW secretariat plans to support your activities by:

- providing free online promotional materials;
- developing more interactive online activities;
- continuing to provide an online platform where you can share your ETW activities.

How can I participate in the Spring ETW?

Similar to past ETWs, all organisations interested in participating are asked to [sign-up on the ETW website](#). By signing up on our website, you pledge to engage in activities for the week. There is no minimum requirement for participation, and you can organise as many activities as you wish. For inspiration and support to implement activities, please visit the [ETW website](#).

The ETW secretariat will collect and share your activities within the network so that other organisations can learn from your experience. You can email your plans directly to the secretariat at eurotest.rigshospitalet@regionh.dk or tag us on social media using @EuroTestWeek or our hashtag #EuroTestWeek

Resources:

COVID-19 impacting HIV testing in most countries, UNAIDS, October 13, 2020.
https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2020/october/20201013_covid19-impacting-hiv-testing-in-most-countries

“ECDC and WHO call for improved HIV testing in Europe”, 26 November, 2020, [ECDC and WHO call for improved HIV testing in Europe \(europa.eu\)](#)