



Department
of Health &
Social Care

*From the Rt Hon Victoria Atkins MP
Secretary of State for Health and Social Care*

11 December 2023

Dear Steve,

Thank you for your letter dated 22nd November 2023 on behalf of the Health and Social Care Committee regarding bloodborne virus opt-out testing.

The Government remains committed to ending all new HIV transmissions, AIDS and HIV-related deaths within England by 2030. We are encouraged by the progress made since 2019 towards our key objectives in the HIV Action Plan, thanks to the hard work of partners across England. It confirms that our 2030 ambitions remain achievable and that we are working towards achieving our 2025 goals.

We know that ending the HIV epidemic will depend on the areas we set out in the HIV Action Plan – prevent, test, treat, retain and stigma. HIV treatment and care remain world class in England and the most beneficial outcomes remain high across all population groups. Prevention efforts to date have been incredibly successful in reducing HIV transmission, particularly in gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men, one of the populations disproportionately impacted by HIV.

As part of the HIV Action Plan, NHS England introduced HIV opt-out testing in local areas with extremely high HIV prevalence. To further maximise the opportunity afforded by the funding for HIV opt-out testing, we decided to implement a combined blood borne viruses (BBV) approach to include Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C testing alongside HIV. Data indicates that this BBV opt-out testing initiative has helped find more than 900 people unaware they are living with HIV or not accessing HIV care. It has also reached over 3000 people living with, or not accessing care for, Hepatitis B and C during the first 18 months of the programme.

Further to this, and after careful consideration of the available evidence, on 29th November, we announced a commitment of £20m to fund new research, commissioned through the National Institute for Health and Care Research, that will involve an expansion and evaluation of BBV opt-out testing in a further 47 emergency departments, in high HIV prevalence areas across England. Funding will support 12 months of testing for each emergency department, to begin during the next financial year.



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We hope to build on the successes of our existing opt-out HIV testing programmes referenced in your letter, to provide the correct care to those who may have otherwise gone undetected and untreated.

I thank you and the Health and Social Care Committee for your continued interest in this area and I hope this reply is helpful.

*Yours ever,
Victoria*

RT HON VICTORIA ATKINS

Secretary of State for Health and Social Care