Potential HIV and Hepatitis Exposure at Philadelphia Dental Office

Unsanitary practices could have put some patients at risk for HIV and hepatitis B and C. They're encouraged to "get tested and make sure."

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Health officials in Philadelphia recommend patients at a dental practice in Center City get tested for HIV and hepatitis due to potential exposure to the viruses resulting from "unsanitary practices" at the clinic between April 2025 and May 2026.

"We don't have any known reason to say that the risk will be potentially high, but the fact of the matter is, when you are in a dentist office that's unsanitary, unsafe, the risk always exists," said James Garrow, Philadelphia's deputy health commissioner, in an interview with ABC News. "So that's why we're really pushing folks who are patients there to get tested and make sure."

The clinic was identified as Smiles at Rittenhouse Square, sometimes called Smiles on the Square, and has since closed. The dentist at the clinic, Kirti Chopra, DDS, had her license temporarily suspended because, according to a Pennsylvania Department of State official, "her continued practice of dentistry presents a clear and immediate danger to public health and safety."

During an unannounced site visit, investigators discovered multiple issues with sterilization and sanitation of dental instruments, gloves and packaging. They also reported finding dental handpieces with blood and saliva left attached to patient equipment after use when they should have been sterilized between patients. The dentist also allegedly admitted to reusing injectable medication and IV saline bags on multiple patients. These unsafe practices put patients at risk for bloodborne pathogens like HIV and hepatitis.

"Anytime people have sharp instruments in their mouths, the potential for transfer of bloodborne pathogens can happen," Garrow said in an interview with CBS News.

Hepatitis refers to inflammation of the liver. When untreated, it can lead to scarring of the liver

(cirrhosis), liver cancer, the need for a liver transplant and death. Hepatitis can be caused by several factors, including toxins, excess alcohol use, autoimmune diseases, fat in the liver and viruses, including the three most common ones: hepatitis A, B and C.

Effective vaccines are available for hep A and B. What's more, hep C is curable in most cases (but not HIV and hep B).

According to "Hepatitis C Transmission and Risk," part of Hep's Basics of Hepatitis, hep C is most easily spread through:

- Sharing needles and other equipment (paraphernalia) used to inject drugs;
- Blood transfusions and organ transplants before July 1992;
- Sexual contact with someone who has hep C;
- Having a mother who had hep C when you were born.

HIV, in contrast, is a virus that attacks the immune system. Over several years, the immune system becomes depleted, and the body isn't able to fight infections, leading to an AIDS diagnosis. Although there is no cure for HIV, many safe and effective treatments—often just one pill a day—are available. The medications help people living with HIV enjoy long and healthy lives and keep them from transmitting the virus to others.

HIV is transmitted through the following body fluids:

- Blood
- Semen
- Pre-cum
- Rectal fluids
- Vaginal fluids
- Breast milk.

HIV is not transmitted though saliva, urine, feces, vomit, sweat, animals, bugs or the air. To learn more, see the POZ Basics on HIV Transmission and Risks.

About 1.2 million people are living with HIV in the United States, and an estimated 13% of them don't know they are positive. What's more, nearly 40% of new HIV cases are transmitted by people who don't know they are HIV positive.

Meanwhile, about 2.3 million people in the United States are living with chronic hepatitis C and 862,000 with hep B virus. These numbers will likely climb, spurred by the opioid crisis and injection drug use.

People who are unsure about their potential exposure at Smiles at Rittenhouse Square can contact the Philadelphia Department of Public Health hotline at 215-685-5488 between 8:30 a.m. and 5 p.m. ET, Monday through Friday.

A preliminary hearing in the open case is scheduled for June 2026.

"Dr. Chopra understands that patients may be concerned by today's announcement from the Philadelphia Department of Public Health," said a lawyer representing Chopra and Smiles at Rittenhouse Square in a statement to 6ABC Philadelphia. "Patient safety is the priority, and Dr. Chopra is cooperating with the Department of Public Health and the Pennsylvania Department of State."

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