

# HIV Testing among a Representative Community Sample of Gay, Bisexual, and Other Men who have Sex with Men in Vancouver, Canada

What are the driving factors behind gay and bisexual men's decision to test or not test for HIV?

## What is the importance of this study?

- Earlier HIV diagnosis through testing allows for improved treatment outcomes and reduces the risk of onward transmission.
- HIV testing guidelines in British Columbia recommend at least yearly testing for gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (gbMSM).
- This study explores the reasons gbMSM report for testing or not testing for HIV and examines factors associated with having tested in the last 2 years.

## FACT BOX

In Metro Vancouver, 80% of gay, bisexual, and other men who have had sex with men report testing for HIV in the past two years.

## How was this study conducted?

- 535 HIV-negative participants were asked if they had ever had an HIV test. Participants were then asked about their reasons for either testing or not testing.
- Among those who reported an HIV test in the past two years, we examined factors associated with testing.
- The study also examined whether or not participants had had a rapid point-of-care test (POCT) the last time they were tested and explored factors associated with rapid testing.

## What are the key study findings?

- 80% of participants reported testing for HIV in the past two years. 10% reported that they had tested more than two years ago. The remaining 10% reported never testing for HIV
- The most common reasons for not testing were considering oneself to be at low risk for HIV and wanting to test but just not having done it yet.
- The most common reasons for having had an HIV test were that it is part of a regular routine and testing after a risk event.
- Of those who had not tested in the past two years, 20% reported condomless anal sex with a partner of different or unknown HIV status.
- Groups that were significantly less likely to have tested in the past two years included bisexual men, men 45 years of age and older and men living outside the city of Vancouver.



- Nearly half of those who had tested in the past two years reported using a POCT at their most recent testing episode.
- Rapid testing was shown to effectively engage some hard-to-reach gbMSM, such as those who have never tested for other sexually transmitted infections.

### What do these findings mean?

- Our findings suggest that some gbMSM at high risk for HIV infection are not testing as frequently as suggested by provincial guidelines.
- Given reported reasons for lack of testing, participants may be underestimating their level of HIV risk or may not be aware of potential HIV exposure events.
- Inclusive and culturally relevant/sensitive messaging around HIV testing may help increase testing in men who may not be well connected to the gay community such as bisexual men, men of colour and older gbMSM.
- Increasing visibility and access to POCT may help improve testing rates, diagnoses and outcomes in hard-to-reach gbMSM groups.

### What is the BC-CfE Momentum Health Study?

Evidence from British Columbia and elsewhere has demonstrated the expansion of access to antiretroviral HIV treatment (ART) can result in population-level reductions in HIV incidence. This is the concept behind the made-in-BC Treatment as Prevention® strategy, or TasP®, which aims to expand early HIV testing and treatment to improve patients' health and curb the spread of HIV. Gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (gbMSM) represent the most affected HIV risk group, both in BC and Canada. The BC-CfE Momentum Health Study is designed to measure changes in HIV risk behaviour, attitudes toward TasP® and the proportion of HIV-positive gbMSM with unsuppressed viral load over time in the Vancouver region. The study uses respondent-driven sampling (RDS) to obtain a more representative sample reflecting the diversity of the gbMSM population in Vancouver.

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