

# Barriers to HIV testing and result delivery preferences among gay and bisexual men undergoing rapid HIV testing in public sexual health clinics in Sydney

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## Background

- HIV notifications among gay and bisexual men (GBM) have been increasing in recent years.
- Guidelines recommend at least annual HIV testing by sexually active GBM, with more frequent testing for high risk men.
- While HIV testing for high risk clients has traditionally involved result delivery in person, non-traditional delivery of HIV results may facilitate more frequent testing by GBM.
- Research on barriers to testing has been conducted using community-based samples, but data on men attending clinics are lacking.
- Knowledge of barriers to testing and test result delivery preferences among these men may help to inform clinic service provision.

## Method

- From October 2011 onwards, GBM attending four Sydney sexual health clinics were offered rapid HIV testing (RHT) using the Alere Determine HIV Combo assay.
- GBM undergoing RHT self-completed anonymous questionnaires assessing testing history and psychological & structural barriers to HIV testing from October 2011 to August 2012.
- Men were also asked about preferred methods to deliver HIV-negative and HIV-positive results: in person, or by telephone, letter, email or short message service (SMS).
- Bivariate & multivariate logistic regression was used to assess associations between client characteristics and result delivery preferences.

## Results

- Of 1093 GBM participants, 87.9% identified as gay and 89.9% had ever tested for HIV. Other client characteristics are as shown in Table 1.
- The main psychological reasons for not testing for HIV among men were: not having done anything risky (29.6%); being scared of a positive result (27.5%); and having been tested recently (24.2%) (Table 2).
- The main structural barriers to HIV testing among men were: finding it annoying to have to return for results (30.2%); finding it stressful to wait for the result (28.4%); and difficulty in finding time to test (20.6%) (Table 2).
- For HIV-negative results, 28.9% of men preferred in-person delivery, but most men (69.3%) preferred non-traditional delivery by telephone (37.0%), by SMS (22.9%), by email (8.3%), or by letter (1.1%) (Table 2).

## Results

Characteristic	N <sup>1</sup> (%)
Sexual identity	
Gay	956 (87.9)
Bisexual/straight/other	116 (12.1)
Age	
18-29 years	493 (45.6)
30-49 years	525 (48.6)
More than 50 years	63 (5.8)
Ever tested for HIV	
Yes	981 (89.9)
No/don't know	110 (10.1)
Frequency of HIV testing	
Four times a year	244 (22.5)
Twice a year	349 (32.1)
Once a year	260 (23.9)
Less than once a year/never tested	234 (21.5)
Preferred site for rapid HIV testing	
Sexual health clinic	815 (74.8)
Home	137 (12.6)
General practice	61 (5.6)
Other <sup>2</sup>	77 (7.1)
Number of sex partners in last 6 months	
None/one	131 (12.1)
2-5 men	451 (41.7)
6-10 men	194 (17.9)
More than 10 men	306 (28.3)

<sup>1</sup> Men with missing data excluded  
<sup>2</sup> Pharmacy, community organisation or gay venue

Table 1: Client characteristics

- For HIV-positive results, most men (71.4%) preferred traditional delivery in person, but nearly a quarter (24.3%) preferred non-traditional delivery (Table 2).
- Preferring electronic (SMS or email) delivery for HIV-negative results was associated with: reporting more than 10 sex partners in six months (adjusted odds ratio [AOR] 1.82, p=0.012); preferring RHT outside of a clinic (AOR 1.54, p=0.004); and finding it annoying to return for results (AOR 1.71, p<0.001).
- Preferring non-traditional delivery for HIV-positive results was associated with having never tested for HIV (AOR 1.65, p=0.050) and preferring RHT outside of a clinic (AOR 1.74, p<0.001).

## Conclusions

- Structural barriers to HIV testing and preference for electronic and other non-traditional methods of HIV result delivery are common among GBM in sexual health clinics.
- Providing non-traditional HIV result delivery may encourage more frequent testing in GBM who report higher numbers of partners, barriers to HIV testing or never having tested for HIV.

Characteristic	N <sup>1</sup> (%)
Preferred delivery of HIV-negative results	
By telephone	403 (37.0)
In-person	316 (30.0)
By SMS <sup>2</sup>	250 (22.9)
By email	90 (8.3)
By letter	12 (1.1)
Don't know	19 (1.7)
Preferred delivery of HIV-positive results	
In-person	778 (71.4)
By telephone	179 (16.4)
By SMS <sup>2</sup>	41 (3.8)
By email	34 (3.1)
By letter	11 (1.0)
Don't know	46 (4.2)
Barriers to testing for HIV	
It's annoying to have to return for results	330 (30.2)
I haven't done anything risky	324 (29.6)
It's stressful waiting for the test result	310 (28.4)
I'm scared of a positive result	300 (27.5)
I have been tested recently	264 (24.2)
It's difficult to find the time to be tested	225 (20.6)
I don't like needles/syringes	104 (9.5)
I don't like having blood taken for the test	64 (5.9)
It's difficult to get an appointment	49 (4.5)
I don't like to show my Medicare card	37 (3.4)
I don't like having a discussion about testing	27 (2.5)
It costs too much to get tested	23 (2.1)
I don't know where to go for a HIV test	20 (1.8)

<sup>1</sup> Men with missing data excluded  
<sup>2</sup> Short message service

Table 2: HIV result delivery preferences & barriers to testing

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