

THE USE OF HIV SELF-TESTING KITS TO TEST PARTNERS WAS COMMON AMONG GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN IN AN AUSTRALIAN TRIAL

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Background: HIV self-testing kits are not yet commercially available in Australia and there is little detailed information available on how self-testing is used by gay and bisexual men (GBM) here or internationally. In the context of a randomised controlled trial (FORTH), we examined the uptake and predictors of self-testing with sexual partners.

Method: Participants were HIV-negative GBM reporting >5 partners or any condomless anal intercourse (CLAI) in the previous 3 months randomised to the self-testing arm (n=180). Men had access to self-testing free-of-charge and completed 3-monthly online questionnaires on sexual behaviour and self-testing of sexual partners.

Results: The analysis includes 164 participants in the self-testing arm who completed any follow-up questionnaire. Median age was 35 years, 90.2% lived in metropolitan areas, and 62.2% were born in Australia. Over a third of men (36.6%, n=60) tested at least one partner during follow-up; and 39 of these provided detailed responses. Half (53.8%, n=21) tested one or more regular partner/boyfriends, 33.3% tested fuckbuddies, and 23.1% tested casual partners. Within each partner category, multiple tests were more common for fuckbuddies (46.2%) and casual partners (44.4%) compared to boyfriends (4.8%). Reasons for testing partners included wanting to: know the partner's serostatus (61.5%), have a test together (35.9%), have sex without condoms (23.1%), and only have sex with an HIV-negative partner (17.9%). In multivariate logistic regression, CLAI with casual partners (CLAI-C) was the only factor associated with testing any partners during follow-up (adjusted odds ratio=2.1, 95% confidence interval=1.1-4.2, p=0.034).

Conclusion: Testing of partners was common, and occurred more often among men who reported CLAI-C. It appeared to be used mostly for the purposes of establishing HIV-negative status for negotiated safety or serosorting. HIV self-tests may facilitate greater certainty around HIV status and negotiation, particularly for men with both casual and regular partners.

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