

Acceptability of Dried Blood Spot Testing for HIV and Other Bloodborne and Sexually Transmitted Infections Among People Incarcerated in Quebec Provincial Prisons

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Background: There is a need to improve and streamline testing for sexually transmitted and bloodborne infections in Canadian provincial prisons, where non-systematic screening contributes to missed opportunities for diagnosis and care. Dried blood spot (DBS) testing enables simultaneous testing for multiple infections without the need for venepuncture or a healthcare professional. This qualitative study explored the acceptability of DBS testing among people incarcerated in Quebec provincial prisons.

Methods: Semi-structured interviews were conducted in two Quebec provincial prisons (one men's, one women's) following disclosure of DBS test results. Participants were purposefully selected to ensure representation of injection drug use history, positive and negative test results, race/ethnicity, and self and assisted collection. Sekhon's Theoretical Framework of Acceptability informed the interview guide and analysis.

Results: Participants (n=30, 50% women, median age 35 years [range: 23-60]) described the DBS test as "easy" and "fast" (affective attitude). Although some participants reported anxiety waiting for their test results, most considered the wait time acceptable, with some stating that any inconvenience was offset by testing for multiple infections concurrently (burden). Participants valued having a choice between self or assisted collection (ethicality). Those who chose assisted collection (n=26) cited confidence in the research team's expertise in performing the test, while some with injecting histories preferred assisted collection to avoid being "triggered" (self-efficacy). Finger prick sampling also accommodated those with difficult venous access due to past drug use (self-efficacy). Incarceration was viewed as an opportune time for testing due to few competing priorities (opportunity cost). Trust in the research team underpinned confidence in test results (perceived effectiveness).

Conclusion: People in Quebec provincial prisons consider DBS testing an acceptable method to test for HIV and other sexually transmitted and bloodborne virus infections. Opt-out DBS testing with options for both self and assisted collection could be incorporated into routine intake procedures.

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