

ENGAGING INFREQUENT TESTERS: AN INNOVATIVE, FREE AND PRIVATE WAY TO TEST FOR HIV

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Purpose:

Dried Blood Spot (DBS) is an innovative finger prick test for HIV and hepatitis C (HCV) that is accessed online by eligible people without the need to attend a health service. The NSW DBS Pilot commenced in 2016 to increase HIV testing among men who have sex with men and people from African and Asian countries. In September 2017, the Pilot expanded to include HCV RNA among Aboriginal people and people who have ever injected drugs and targeted services. DBS was added to the mix of options in NSW to increase testing and treatment for people who experience barriers to accessing conventional testing services. The Pilot will run until December 2020.

Approach:

The Pilot targets people that have never tested before or test infrequently. The Pilot reduces barriers to conventional testing methods by making testing easy with a self-administered test that can be done at home. DBS is also available at targeted sites including drug and alcohol services; needle and syringe programs; outreach and community health services. This flexibility supports equitable access and a culturally appropriate service.

Impact:

From November 2016 to March 2018, thirty-six per cent of people who ordered a DBS test have never been tested for HIV before or have not tested in the previous two years. Interim results for the Pilot including the kit return rate, positivity and linkage to care will be presented at the conference.

Innovation and significance:

DBS is an innovative testing model which provides flexibility to support equitable access for people who may have experienced barriers to conventional health services. DBS has increased testing and access to HIV and HCV treatment among hard to reach groups.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

NSW Health funds St Vincent's Laboratory and SHIL to run the DBS pilot. NSW Health does not receive funding from pharmaceutical companies for HIV or hepatitis C therapies.