

SEXUAL HEALTH KNOWLEDGE, BEHAVIOUR AND HEALTH SERVICE USE AMONG INTERNATIONAL MSM STUDENTS IN AUSTRALIA

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Background: Almost 230,000 international students are enrolled at tertiary institutions in NSW where recent HIV notification rates have increased among overseas-born men who have sex with men (MSM). Many of these are thought to be international students. Research on international student MSM sexual health knowledge, behaviour and health services access is scarce. This study aimed to explore knowledge, behaviour and barriers to accessing health services and PrEP.

Methods: A cross-sectional survey was completed by 168 tertiary international MSM students in NSW. We collected information about demographics, sexual health knowledge and behaviour including HIV treatment, PrEP and PEP use, and STI testing, as well as access and barriers to health services.

Results: The median age of participants was 25 years. Knowledge about HIV, STIs and PReP and PEP availability was moderately high; being in Australia for more than 12 months was associated with higher knowledge of hep A and B vaccination and PEP availability. Less than 50% of participants reported consistent condom use, and less than a third of those with inconsistent condom use reported currently using PrEP. Twenty per cent had never been tested for HIV, 30% had not been tested in the past year and almost 40% had never tested for syphilis. Confidentiality and cost were the most frequently cited barriers to health care; these were not associated with duration of being in Australia, participants from Asian countries were more likely to cite confidentiality than those from Europe, North and Latin America.

Conclusion: Gaps in knowledge, high levels of high-risk sexual practices, low levels of HIV and other STI testing, and the existence of barriers to accessing health services provide useful information for developing health promotion strategies to target this population.

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