

A NEW NORMAL? THE CONTINUING IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON AUSTRALIAN GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN'S BEHAVIOUR: RESULTS FROM THE GAY COMMUNITY PERIODIC SURVEYS 2017-22

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Background: COVID-19 emerged in 2020 and continues to disrupt everyday life and engagement with health services. After another year of the pandemic, we assessed the ongoing impact of COVID-19 on gay and bisexual men's (GBM) sexual activity, HIV testing and PrEP use.

Methods: National data from the Gay Community Periodic Surveys, repeated, cross-sectional surveys of GBM, were included from 2017/18-2021/22. We report responses to questions about COVID-19 and trends in key HIV-related indicators. Trends were assessed with logistic regression.

Results: 41,780 survey responses were included. The mean age was 38.1 years, 85.0% were gay-identified, 9.8% bisexual, 70.3% Australian-born, and 8.2% HIV-positive. The proportion recruited online increased from 20.7% in 2017/18 to 96.0% in 2020/21 then decreased to 56.8% in 2021/22. Of 8,000 participants in 2021/22, 70.8% had been tested for COVID-19 in the past six months, 93.7% were fully vaccinated against COVID-19, and 49.0% had fewer sexual partners because of COVID-19 (compared with 52.1% in 2020/21, $p<.001$). The proportion reporting no recent male partners increased from 12.7% in 2017/18 to 18.1% in 2020/21 ($p<.001$), before decreasing to 16.2% in 2021/22 ($p=.003$). The proportion of non-HIV-positive men who had been tested for HIV within the past year decreased from 70.6% in 2017/18 to 57.2% in 2020/21 ($p<.001$) and remained stable at 56.8% in 2021/22 ($p=.583$). PrEP use by non-HIV-positive men increased from 20.4% in 2017/18 to 35.2% in 2019/20 ($p<.001$), then decreased to 29.3% in 2020/21 ($p<.001$) and partially rebounded to 32.9% in 2021/22 ($p<.001$). Taking PrEP 'on demand' increased from 6.8% in 2018/19 to 28.5% in 2021/22 ($p<.001$).

Conclusion: We recorded widespread social and behavioural impacts of COVID-19, particularly during 2020/21. Recent HIV testing remains lower than before COVID-19. PrEP use partially rebounded in 2021/22, coincident with some increased sexual activity, but not to pre-COVID-19 levels.

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