

HIV SELF-TEST: KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES, AND PRACTICES AMONG ASIAN-BORN GAY, BISEXUAL, AND OTHER MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN IN AUSTRALIA

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Background:

To explore novel interventions to improve awareness of HIV status, we aimed to examine the knowledge, attitudes, and practices of HIV self-testing (HIVST) among Asian-born gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (GBMSM).

Methods:

This qualitative study used semi-structured interviews of self-identified GBMSM who are of Asian ethnicity and were born overseas. Participants were recruited from personal networks, social media platforms, snowballing, and the Melbourne Sexual Health Centre. Twenty-five participants were purposively sampled with a range of ages and previous experiences of HIVST.

Results:

A majority of participants were unaware of HIV self-testing before the interview and only a few had ever used one before. Most had limited sexual health knowledge prior to their arrival in Australia. Upon learning about HIV self-testing during the interview, many expressed willingness to use HIVST, but only under limited circumstances, such as travelling overseas, interim testing while taking on-demand PrEP, and point-of-sex testing. Almost all (23/25) of them were open to distributing HIVST to their casual partners or friends, especially those who they know engaged in high-risk sexual behaviour and were not engaged in sexual health care. However, about half of the participants still preferred traditional serology testing. The reasons cited include regular HIV testing as part of PrEP prescription, need for STI tests, HIVST has a long window period and lack of self-confidence in performing the HIV self-test correctly. Seven participants who had prior experience of HIVST either in their country of origin or in Australia knew or received the HIVST from their friends or partners. Their reasons for utilising HIVST were: to avoid facility-based testing due to confidentiality and privacy reasons, fear of judgement from healthcare staff, point-of-sex testing, and testing after high-risk exposure.

Conclusion:

Peer education and secondary distribution may help raise HIV self-testing rates and awareness among the Asian-born GBMSM population.

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