USE OF A RAPID HIV HOME TEST TO SCREEN POTENTIAL SEXUAL PARTNERS PREVENTS HIV EXPOSURE IN A HIGH RISK SAMPLE OF MSM

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SUMMARY

- HIV home testing (HT) helps identify high-risk partners, allowing users to modify their sexual behavior to decrease their own risk of HIV infection.
- HT is highly acceptable among high-risk MSM and they urge its availability OTC.
- HT use can prevent instances of potential HIV transmission.

- HT can increase frequency of HIV testing in high-risk MSM.
- HIV home testing may become an important harm reduction technology.
- Making home testing available within networks where high-risk sexual practices are common may be an efficient way to identify previously undetected cases of HIV infection.

INTRODUCTION

Background

- The FDA may soon license a rapid oral fluid HIV antibody test for over-the-counter sale and private home use.
- HT may be used to screen sex partners.
- Little is known about motivations, strategies, obstacles, and problems that could arise.

Study Question

- Would HIV-negative, non-monogamous gay and bisexual men living in New York City who never or rarely use condoms be interested in testing their partners prior to receptive anal intercourse as a harm-reduction approach?

METHODS

Screening (Visit 1)

- CASI assessment (sexual behavior, HIV knowledge and HT comprehension)
- Unassisted rapid HIV self-test followed by confirmatory test

Enrollment (Visit 2) and 3-month study period

- 16 rapid HIV test kits (plus condoms) given to participants
- 24-hour hotline run by clinical psychologists
- Weekly sexual behavior reports via phone reporting system
- 3 month follow-up (Visit 3)
- In-depth interview with clinical psychologist

RESULTS

Participants liked having access to HT and found it easy to use. You just swipe it once on the top [gum], swipe it once on the bottom, and then put it in the test tube and stuff like that. It's pretty easy. Simple. (R014, 25 years-old, AA)

Participants carried HT kits around for use in various locations. At this point, I start carrying some of them with me, the tests with me. So just in case anything happens, I have my little plastic baggie, open it up, do what we have to do. And we went to his place, and I said, you know, I really like you, this is really hot, and I think we can really have fun here. How would you like to test with me? (R015, 33, W)

Most partners were receptive to using HT prior to sex. People were a lot more willing to try the test than I was expecting, . . . and I had no problems, no hostility or anything toward me asking them to take the test. And it went perfectly fine. (R013, 19, L)

Participants often interpreted refusals as a warning sign. And the ones that wasn’t with it, after I didn’t do nothing with them, or I used a – or I used a condom with them. Yeah, ‘cause I just didn’t feel I could say ‘cause I was thinking they was infected.” (R014, 25, AA)

Mutual testing often took place. I did it for him, and he did it for me. We opened the kits, you know, put like a couple of little things in my mouth by-side. And I swallowed him. He swallowed me. We put it in. And then we waited the 20 minutes, which seemed like a lifetime (laughs). (R017, 47, W)

Some participants found the wait beneficial to ponder what to do next. The 20-minute window sort of gives you that extra 20 minutes to decide, “Okay, if this comes back negative, am I really ready to bareback?” (R017, 47, W)

Some participants found out about their positive status using HT. You know, it went really, really well. And then he got the [positive] result [laughter] – He had no idea. I guess. […] He’s like, ‘What do you mean? I’m pretty sure it didn’t give you a false positive, this is a, you know, this is pretty straightforward […] And he got pretty upset, you know, it was hard to see that. I said listen, I’m with you, if you want to go to another clinic and get restated. If you want to try me to bring you down to, you know, one of the counseling centers, if you want to contact the people in my study, I can do that. (R015, 33, W)

In most cases substance use did not hamper HT use. If you would just meet somebody in a bar, having a few drinks, some of the inhibitions come down, the walls come down, and other topics of conversation are available to come above to the surface. So I think with the alcohol with the testing, I think it was just the way that I can incorporate the tests into the conversation or between our engagement as not a tool, but just as a preface to go on to do other things. (R016, 43, W)

Participants felt that having access to HT changed their habitual behavior. Because I’ve been in the study […] I’m kind of raised from having sex with people where I don’t know what their status is. But I tell you this, I always ask now. That’s the closest I can come to knowing, and I want as much of that kind of feeling as I can get. And it always makes me wish I had the test to see if I was right. (R0121, 58, A)

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Baseline Characteristics (N=27)

Demographics

- mean (SD) Range
- Age 34 (11.4) 18-58
- Annual income $20,587 (22,863) 0-90K

Sexual behavior in prior three months

- # male partners 15.3 (17.8) 3-90
- # UAI occasions 10.8 (16.3) 0-80
- # UAI occasions 9.1 (16.6) 0-80

Lifetime history of STIs 48%

Alcohol use in prior three months

- 93%

Marijuana use in prior three months

- 56%

Race/Ethnicity (N=27)

- Black/African American 41%
- Latino 19%
- White 19%
- Other/Mixed Race 19%

Home Test Use Over 3 Months (~140 partners)

- 16% of partners agreed to HT
- 7% of partners refused HT
- 72% of partners not asked to use HT

HOME TEST USE

- 101 sexual partners agreed to use HT
- 10 positive home tests
- 7 sexual partners (6 were unaware of HIV+ status)
- 3 acquaintances
- 2 participants each had 2 partners test positive
- 2 participants disclosed HIV+ status after HT use was proposed
- 4 calls to study hotline about test result interpretation
- 7 verbally aggressive reactions; no physical violence (of 124 partners asked to use test)

No sexual intercourse occurred when a partner tested positive. The people that I tested that actually came out positive, I didn’t proceed to have sex with them. […] I still hung out or whatever like that, but I didn’t wind up having sex though. It definitely put it in my mind that I shouldn’t have sex with the person. (R0130, 26, L)