

Identifying Gay Men With Acute HIV Infection Through Promotional Campaigns and Laboratory Testing



CIHR Team in the Study of Acute HIV Infection in Gay Men
Early Recognition and Rapid Response to HIV Status

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Article: Mark Gilbert, Darrel Cook, Malcolm Steinberg, Michael Kwag, Wayne Robert, Glenn Doupe, Mel Krajdén, Michael Rekart. Targeting screening and social marketing to increase detection of acute HIV infection in men who have sex with men in Vancouver, British Columbia. *AIDS*, October 23, 2013; 27(16): 2649-2654

What is the study about?

People with acute HIV infection (in the first few months after infection) have high viral loads and are more likely to pass HIV on to others. This study looked at whether a new testing method which detects the presence of the HIV virus during very early infection (called pooled nucleic acid amplification testing, or NAAT), combined with campaigns to promote the test, would lead to more gay men being diagnosed during the acute HIV infection period.

How was the study done?

All HIV antibody negative blood specimens from males over 18 years from six clinics in Vancouver, British Columbia were entered into the pooled NAAT method from April 2009 to March 2012. Two social marketing campaigns, "What Are You Waiting For?" and "Hottest at the Start," were developed by a community gay men's health agency to promote awareness of the pooled NAAT test and educate about acute HIV infection. We used provincial HIV testing data and surveillance data to describe changes before and after the use of pooled NAAT in the number of acute HIV diagnoses and overall testing trends.

This study showed that a targeted, focused use of pooled NAAT in six clinics was very effective in identifying acute HIV, and also that promotional campaigns are important to get the most impact from new HIV testing methods.

What did the study find?

The study found that introducing pooled NAAT resulted in diagnosing acute HIV infection in 25 men who would otherwise have had a negative HIV antibody test, or 11.5% of all new diagnoses. This percentage is higher than in other similar studies, which may be related to the two promotional campaigns. These campaigns may also help to explain the increase in frequency of HIV testing at the six study clinics over the study period and a shift to earlier diagnosis seen among men diagnosed with HIV.

Why is the study important?

Increasing the number of people diagnosed with HIV early in the course of their infection is important as most people will take measures to protect their partners once they know their status. This is particularly important for acute HIV when viral loads and the chances of passing HIV to others are very high. This study showed that a targeted, focused use of pooled NAAT in six clinics was very effective in identifying acute HIV, and also that promotional campaigns are important to get the most impact from new HIV testing methods.