

An Event-Level Analysis of the Interpersonal Factors Associated with Condomless Anal Sex among Gay, Bisexual and other Men who have Sex with Men with Online-Met Partners

Condomless anal sex among gbMSM with partners met online is associated with a variety of interpersonal factors to be considered in health interventions.

What is the BC-CfE Momentum Health Study?

Evidence from British Columbia and elsewhere has demonstrated the expansion of access to antiretroviral HIV treatment (ART) can result in population-level reductions in HIV incidence. This is the concept behind the made-in-BC Treatment as Prevention® strategy, or TasP®, which aims to expand early HIV testing and treatment to improve patients' health and curb the spread of HIV. Gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (gbMSM) represent the most affected HIV risk group, both in BC and Canada. The BC-CfE Momentum Health Study is designed to measure changes in HIV risk behaviour, attitudes toward TasP® and the proportion of HIV-positive gbMSM with unsuppressed viral load over time in the Vancouver region. The study uses respondent-driven sampling (RDS) to obtain a more representative sample reflecting the diversity of the gbMSM community in Vancouver.

FACT BOX

Among gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men, increases in HIV and other STIs (sexually transmitted infections) have been attributed to the popularity of online dating apps and websites. This study sought to examine what factors predict condom use with online-met partners.

What are the key study findings?

- Of the 774 participants in the study, 74% reported at least one sexual encounter with a partner that was met online. Of those participants, a total of 39% reported having condomless anal sex with an online-met partner.
- Among HIV-negative men, community connectedness, social embeddedness and altruistic attitudes were associated with increased condom use.
- Among HIV-positive men, altruistic attitudes were also protective against condomless sex.
- Event-level factors, such as partner serostatus (defined as the presence or absence of detectable levels of HIV virus in an individual's blood, semen or rectal fluid), were significant predictors of condom use for both HIV-negative men and those living with HIV.



What do these findings mean?

- Pro-social interventions that promote altruism, community-building and sex-positive education have the potential to reduce HIV risk among gbMSM who meet their partners online.
- Programs should also focus on helping individuals navigate sexual partnerships by promoting capacity-building centred on condom and safe-sex negotiations.

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