

Article: Mark Gilbert, Travis Salway, Devon Haag, Elizabeth Elliot, Christopher Fairley, Mel Krajden, Troy Grennan, Jean Shoveller, Gina Ogilvie. A cohort study comparing rate of repeat testing for sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections between clients of an internet-based testing programme and of sexually transmitted infection clinics in Vancouver, Canada. Sexually Transmitted Infections 2019.



## Why did we do this study?

Making it easier and more convenient for people to get tested might also mean that people get tested more often, which could lead to identifying infections and treating them earlier. This is thought to be one of the benefits of internet-based testing services for sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBI) - like BC's GetCheckedOnline.com program (GCO) - but it hasn't been looked at before.

To fill this knowledge gap, we compared how often people using GCO get tested and compared this to people testing through STI clinics in Vancouver.

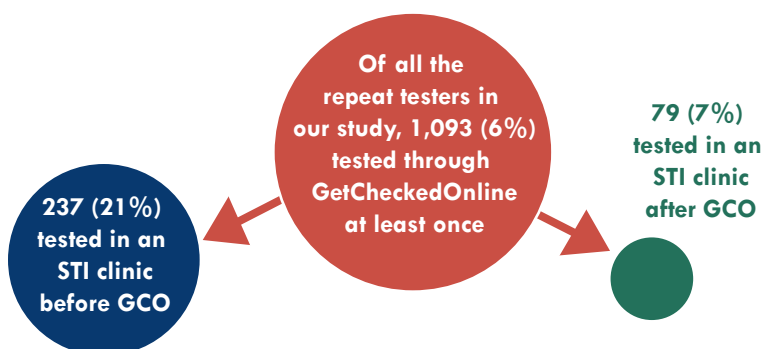
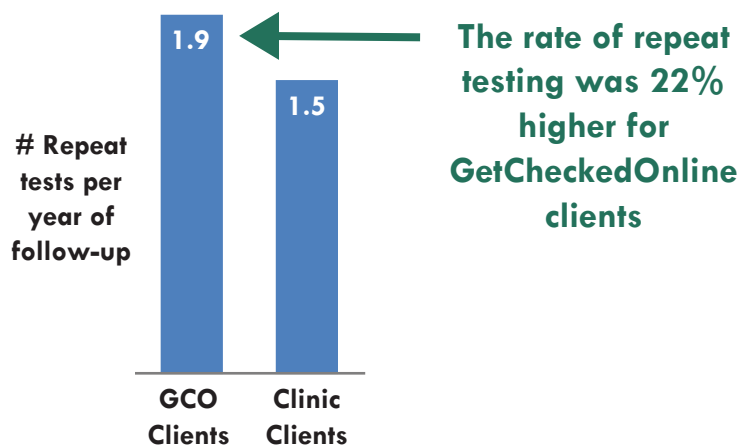
## What did we do?

We compared testing patterns over time for people using GCO and at three STI clinics in Vancouver for just over two years after GCO launched in September 2014. We then compared how often people tested between the two groups. As someone's frequency of testing is likely related to who they are and the types of sex they are having, we took these differences into account in the analysis.

## What did we find?

We looked at data for 1,093 people testing through GCO and 18,404 people testing through the three STI clinics, of whom 40% and 45% had tested more than once during the 29 months of the study. GCO clients on average repeat tested 1.9 times per year of follow-up, which was 22% higher than for STI clinic clients at 1.5 times. This effect stayed true even after we took differences between the two groups into account.

In comparing the two groups, we also found that some of the people testing through GCO had also tested in the STI clinics during the study period, both before and after using GCO.



## Why is this important?

Our study is the first to suggest that internet-based testers for STBBI have a higher frequency of testing compared to clinic-based testers, which we think is due to the convenience of the GCO service. The GCO service also includes automatic testing reminders (at 3, 6, and 12 months) which is probably also helping. If this leads to earlier diagnosis and treatment, then GCO could help in preventing the spread of these infections – something we'll be looking at in future studies.

That some people used both GCO and STI clinic services during the study reinforces that services like GCO are a complement to face-to-face clinical services, and shouldn't be seen as a replacement.