

Online versus in-person testing: A qualitative analysis of testing preferences among youth and men who have sex with men using an online HIV/STI testing service in Vancouver, Canada

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BACKGROUND:

- Youth and gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (GBMSM) are priority populations for increasing testing
- *GetCheckedOnline.com* (GCO) is an online HIV/STI testing service developed to overcome barriers to testing and launched in 2014

OBJECTIVE:

- To assess client acceptability and perceptions of online HIV/STI testing, as well as how social positions related to age, sexual identity, and geography affected preferences for online versus in-person testing.

METHODS:

- **Eligibility:** English speaking, created lab form through GCO, youth (15-29 years), GBMSM (30+, identify as man/trans man who has sex with men)
- **Recruitment:** E-mail invitation to clients consenting to be contacted for research
- **Interview:** Structured interview guide, including screenshots of GCO
- **Analysis:** Review of transcripts/interview notes using thematic analysis, in Nvivo
- Coding framework informed by grounded theory, with initial themes refined iteratively

RESULTS:

Table 1: Participant characteristics

Characteristic	Youth (N=12) n (%)	GBMSM (N=19) n (%)
Age (mean)	26 years	47 years
Female	1 (8)	0 (0)
White	7 (58)	16 (84)
Mixed	2 (17)	0 (0)
Chinese	1 (8)	1 (5)
South Asian	1 (8)	0 (0)
Black	1 (8)	0 (0)
Latin	0 (0)	1 (5)
Filipino	0 (0)	1 (5)
Straight	6 (50)	0 (0)
Gay	4 (33)	12 (63)
Bisexual	2 (17)	5 (26)
Pansexual	0 (0)	1 (5)
Queer	0 (0)	1 (5)
Graduate school	2 (17)	7 (37)
Undergrad or trade	8 (67)	9 (47)
High school	2 (17)	1 (5)
Some high school	0 (0)	2 (11)

CONCLUSIONS:

- Participants generally expressed a preference for GCO because of convenience, anonymity, control over tests received, and speed of receiving results
- GCO was perceived as a good for GBMSM (particularly in rural areas) who prefer not to disclose their sexual orientation to a health care provider.
- In-person testing was perceived as a better option for people with symptoms, anxiety, or younger people inexperienced with STI/HIV testing.
- Many participants anticipated using a combination of services in the future depending on their needs.

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Preferences for Online Testing: Convenience, Privacy , Control, Contemporary

I would say online testing is way easier and way more convenient and, like, definitely my preferred method. I would not want to go back in for an in-person test now that I've been through the online system.
Female, 26 years, straight

...some people might not want to give a phone number and they might want to just stay as anonymous as possible and if I have a way of going online and finding out for myself where I stand with this, that's better for me. You might find, you know, it might work better for you that more people will [...] come because they feel like they've got the anonymity.
Male, 71 years, bisexual

I guess also the less... judgment, which I think other people would experience more of, but that I have gone to GPs, asked for HIV tests and they're like, you know, "You don't need one." Like, "Well now I've - now I'm worried I have HIV and I feel stupid", right? [...] There's worse things to feel than stupid but uh, definitely, even for me who, I'm pretty privileged and don't have a lot of that kind of judgment in my life, like, I still prefer getting tested online for that reason. *Male, 25 years, gay*

In-person testing is kind of... it's... I find it's really banal because when you go into the office you just wait there and you just like get all your information. You're sitting in public and you're just like telling them all about your stuff and it's like, you know, I can see people not doing that because it's so... it's so public... I find that so outdated. [...] I think it's just - [GCO] is the way to go, this is the future. *Male, 29 years, straight*

Preferences for In-Person Testing: Thoroughness, Counselling, Symptoms

The difference, I think... 'cause the clinic, it's more thorough. Like, 'cause you're meeting with a person and then the nurse asks you questions in very detail. Obviously, if you have any questions [...] you can bring it up and then discuss with the nurse or if have a more complicated situation, you can ask the doctor to come in and check. Whereas [with online testing], it's just drop off your sample and go, so yeah. *Male, 35 years, gay*

It's an online form that has no professional interaction, right? And so even though it may suit your needs, you might have some other experiences or situations that could benefit from seeing somebody who's trained in the field, right? Like, this service doesn't identify if I have HIV anxiety, right? *Male, 28 years, bisexual*

If I had some sort of, you know, something that I was experiencing that was painful or suspicious looking, I might want a doctor or a professional to see it as opposed to just getting checked online. *Male, 60 years, gay*

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

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