

Sexual health service access during the COVID-19 pandemic: Increased use of internet-based sexually-transmitted and blood borne infections (STBBI) testing in British Columbia

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Background

- *GetCheckedOnline*, BC's internet-based testing service for sexually-transmitted and blood borne infections (STBBI), has remained accessible since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic public health response
- **Objective:** To describe *GetCheckedOnline* program utilization and selected risk factors before and during the COVID-19 pandemic

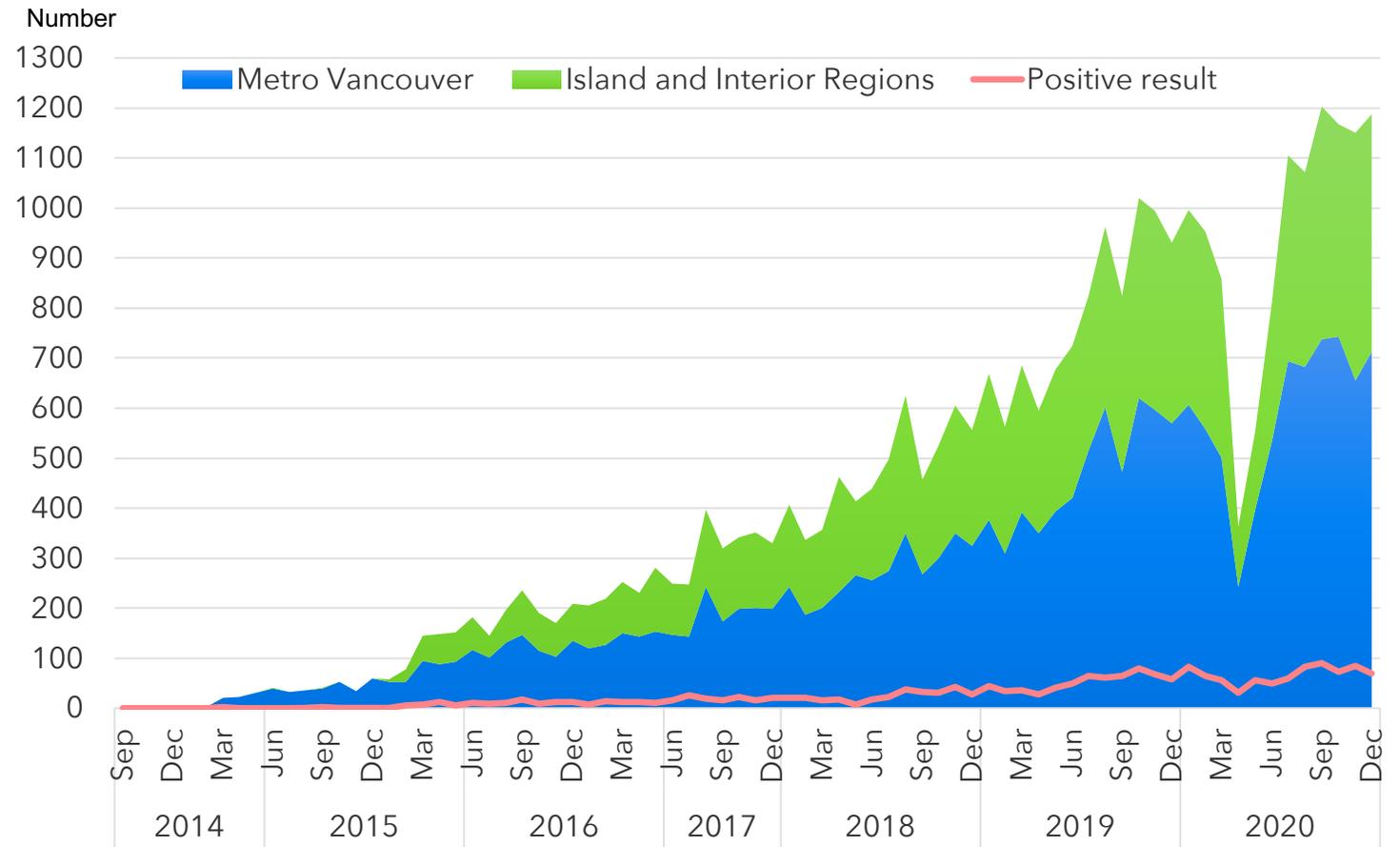


Figure: Monthly GetCheckedOnline Test Episodes Completed



Methods

- Data sources: GetCheckedOnline program data linked with laboratory testing data
- Time periods:
 - "Pre-pandemic": March - December 2019
 - "During pandemic": March - December 2020
- Outcomes:
 - number of monthly test episodes completed
 - proportion of test episodes completed by first-time GetCheckedOnline users
 - percent positivity: average proportion of monthly test episodes with at least one STBBI-positive result
 - Proportion of symptomatic testing
 - Proportion of testing due to STBBI contact
- Analysis:
 - Bivariate comparison between time periods using chi-square tests (significant at $p < 0.05$)



Results

Variable	Pre-pandemic March - December 2019	During pandemic March - December 2020
Total # of completed test episodes	8237	9470
Median # of completed episodes per month [^]	824	1099
% of test episodes completed by first-time GetCheckedOnline users	51.1%	56.9%*
Percent positivity [^]	5.7%	6.4%
Symptomatic testing	19.5%	19.7%
Testing due to STBBI contact	9.4%	10.9%*

*significantly different from pre-pandemic percent, $p < 0.05$

[^]no statistical comparison



Discussion

- Despite a sharp decline in GetCheckedOnline use from March-May 2020, there has been considerable demand for STI testing in BC during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- A greater proportion of testing completed by STBBI contacts and a slightly higher test percent positivity during the pandemic demonstrates that the program remains a critical STBBI testing service in BC
- More testing being completed by first-time users during the pandemic suggests that GetCheckedOnline may address new barriers to in-person sexual health services that have emerged during the pandemic (e.g., clinic closures and/or reduced clinic hours, concerns about COVID-19 transmission)