

# Sexual health service needs by gender and sexual orientation among clients in British Columbia during the first few months of the COVID-19 pandemic response

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# Background

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Existing disparities in sexual health service access experienced by sexual and gender minorities may have been exacerbated by public health responses to the COVID-19 pandemic

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Objective: To describe differences in service access among a diverse sample of sexual health service clients in British Columbia (BC)



# Methods & Participants

## "Sex in the Time of COVID-19" Survey

- Anonymous, online survey
- Recruited participants from BCCDC's STI clinic & *GetCheckedOnline* clients  $\geq 16$  years old
- Conducted July 21 – Aug 4, 2020

## Survey Participant Sexual Health Needs by Gender and Sexual Orientation

Category: Gender and sexual orientation	# of participants	# with sexual health need (%)
Men, straight	247	93 (38%)
Men, sexual minority	331	239 (72%)
Women, straight	342	196 (57%)
Women, sexual minority	221	139 (63%)
Non-binary, Genderfluid, Other gender	55	38 (69%)



# Results

Among participants who had a sexual health need:	Men, straight (N=93)	Men, sexual minority (N=239)	Women, straight (N=196)	Women, sexual minority (N=139)	Non-binary, Genderfluid, Other gender (N=38)
Accessed all needed services	35 (38%)	139/239 (58%)	101 (52%)	48 (35%)	17 (45%)
Barriers in accessing sexual health care during the COVID-19 pandemic					
There was public messaging that I was not supposed to seek healthcare that wasn't urgent	<b>29 (31%)</b>	<b>64 (27%)</b>	<b>61 (31%)</b>	<b>67 (48%)</b>	<b>18 (47%)</b>
I was concerned about getting COVID-19 while at a clinic or lab	<b>22 (24%)</b>	<b>69 (29%)</b>	<b>53 (27%)</b>	<b>56 (40%)</b>	<b>22 (58%)</b>
I was concerned about getting COVID-19 while travelling to a clinic or lab	19 (20%)	43 (18%)	34 (17%)	<b>42 (30%)</b>	<b>18 (47%)</b>
The place I usually go to for testing/care was closed/had reduced services because of COVID-19	<b>22 (24%)</b>	<b>65 (27%)</b>	<b>50 (26%)</b>	35 (25%)	10 (26%)
I didn't know where to access sexual health or STI testing services	12 (13%)	24 (10%)	23 (12%)	19 (14%)	3 (8%)
I was worried that a healthcare provider might judge me for having sex during COVID	8 (9%)	31 (13%)	21 (11%)	19 (14%)	6 (16%)
I live or am in close contact with someone at risk of COVID-19	3 (3%)	10 (4%)	5 (3%)	11 (8%)	11 (29%)

**Bold:** Three most prevalent barriers reported per gender/sexual orientation group



# Discussion

- The most commonly reported barriers to accessing sexual health services during the COVID-19 pandemic differed by gender and sexual orientation
- Inequities in sexual health care access experienced by sexual and gender minorities must be addressed in service planning and delivery throughout and beyond the pandemic response