

Seroadaptive Strategies of Gay & Bisexual Men with the Highest Quartile Number of Sexual Partners in Vancouver, Canada

How are sexually active gay and bisexual men managing their risk for HIV?

What is the importance of this study?

- Recent global reviews of HIV research literature have demonstrated continued disparities in the sexual health and wellbeing of gay and bisexual men (GBM) as compared with other men and women.
- One prominent factor associated with increased HIV risk is an individual's number of sexual partners.
- Despite continued research among this population, few studies have examined how men with more sexual partners manage their increased risk for HIV.

FACT BOX

Sex-positive community engagement is needed for men with multiple sexual partners; in particular, on how specific risk reduction strategies can be used to reduce their risk of acquiring HIV.

Seroadaptive strategies are practices often used by GBM in an attempt to reduce the risk of spreading or contracting HIV. Some of these behaviours include asking about HIV status, only having partners with the same HIV status, using condoms on a regular basis, avoiding anal sex, strategic positioning during sex, and—for HIV-negative men—only having sex with HIV-positive partners who have undetectable viral loads.

How was this study conducted?

- The Momentum Health Study is a cohort study following a group of GBM for an extended period of time while investigating possible treatment optimism and risk compensation.
- Using baseline survey data collected between February 2012 and February 2014, the behaviour of men with seven or more sexual partners was compared to the behaviour of those who had less than seven partners.

What are the key study findings?

- The data show a higher prevalence of seroadaptive behaviours and prevention strategies amongst GBM with more sexual partners (i.e. more than seven in the past six months).
- While HIV-negative men with the highest number of male anal sex partners were more likely to ask about their partner's HIV status as precursor to other seroadaptive strategies, they were less likely to avoid anal sex as a means of seroadaptation.
- HIV-positive men with the highest number of male anal sex partners reported a higher prevalence of seroadaptive behaviours than HIV-negative men with a similar number of partners.



- HIV-positive men who are aware of their HIV-infection are less likely to infect sexual partners than those who are not aware.

What do these findings mean?

- These findings show that men with the highest number of male anal sex partners are more likely to employ seroadaptive strategies (other than condom use and anal sex avoidance) than men with fewer sexual partners, helping them to manage their risk for HIV.
- Recommended future research should aim to (1) determine the adequacy of these HIV prevention strategies, (2) assess how GBM perceive the effectiveness of these strategies, and (3) to determine the social and health impacts of widespread uptake of these strategies.

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 (GBM) who have sex with men (MSM) 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 GBM 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 GBM community in Vancouver.

Full paper available online: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/27568338>

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