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Characteristics of First-Time HIV Self-Testers Using the Online HIV Service ‘Stand By You’

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BACKGROUND

- First-time testers are often overlooked by conventional HIV services, yet they play a critical role in achieving the goal of ensuring all at-risk individuals know their status.
- Online platforms—such as TikTok and LINE—offer accessible, anonymous, and engaging options to reach these groups, especially at-risk adolescents and young adults. By leveraging digital channels, innovative HIV self-testing (HIVST) initiatives can connect with those reluctant to HIV testing.

METHODS

- The ‘Stand by You’ initiative integrated free HIVST, online text-based counseling, and educational support on HIV prevention, covering pre- and post-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP, PEP), facilitating linkage to care.
- TikTok ads targeted at-risk adolescents and young adults.
- After completing a self-administered risk assessment questionnaire, eligible individuals received HIVST kits by mail and were encouraged to voluntarily report their HIVST results without incentives.
- Instant text-based chatroom counseling (from 10:00–22:00) provided guidance and support on HIV and STI-related issues.
- Data from August 25, 2022, to December 31, 2024, were analyzed to describe the characteristics of first-time testers and identify factors associated with a positive HIVST result.

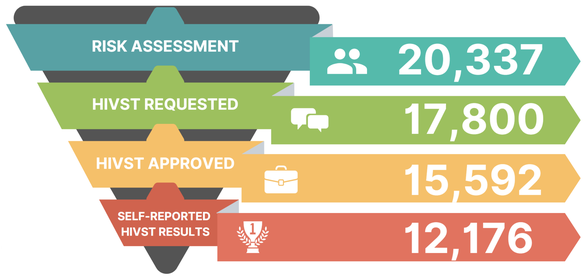
RESULTS

- Among 8,234 participants, 4,677 (56.8%) were first-time testers.
- Compared with repeat testers, first-time testers were
  - ✓ younger (under 25 years old 54.3% vs. 39.4%, P<0.001),
  - ✓ less likely to self-identify as LGBTQIA+ (51.6% vs. 74.4%, P<0.001),
  - ✓ less likely to use HIV chemoprophylaxis (PrEP 0.6% vs. 12.2%; PEP 1.0% vs. 13.6%, P<0.001).
  - ✓ lower condom use
  - ✓ lower average number of sexual partners in the past month (2.6 vs. 2.8, P=0.04)
  - ✓ exhibited a higher HIV positivity rate (4.0% vs. 2.5%, P<0.001).

“First-time HIV self-testers, particularly younger individuals, had a higher HIV positivity rate and were less likely to use prevention methods like PrEP”,

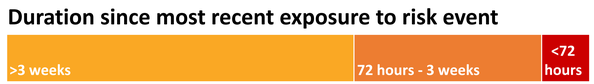
highlighting the critical role of digital platforms in reaching at-risk groups and promoting earlier HIV detection.

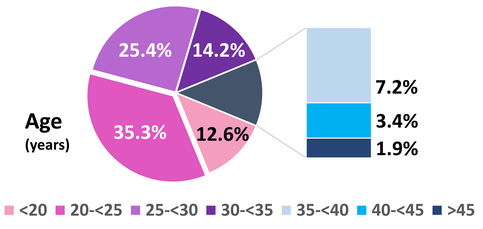












RESULTS (cont.)

- In multivariable analysis, factors significantly associated with a positive HIVST result among first-time testers included identifying as LGBTQIA+ (adjusted odds ratio [aOR] 7.41, 95% CI: 4.82–11.39, P<0.001), having a history of sexually transmitted infections (aOR 1.86, 95% CI: 1.37–2.53, P<0.001), and being older (aOR 1.03 per year increase, 95% CI: 1.01–1.05, P=0.004).

CONCLUSIONS

- First-time testers showed a higher risk of HIV infection, emphasizing the importance of digital outreach in closing HIV testing gaps. By offering convenient and stigma-free avenues, online platforms can expand HIVST uptake among at-risk groups—particularly those with no prior testing history—facilitating earlier detection and treatment.



Characteristic	First-Time Testers (N = 4,677)	Repeat Testers (N = 3,557)	P-value
Male sex assigned at birth; n (%)	2,865 (61.3)	2,877 (80.9)	<0.001
Age (years); mean (SD)	25.4 (6.7)	27.5 (6.9)	<0.001
Non-heterosexual gender orientation (LGBTQIA+); n (%)	2,414 (51.6)	2,648 (74.4)	<0.001
History of HIV chemoprophylaxis; n (%)			
PrEP	30 (0.6)	435 (12.2)	<0.001
PEP	45 (1.0)	484 (13.6)	<0.001
Never used condoms; n (%)	890 (19.0)	348 (9.8)	<0.001
Drug and substance use; n (%)	78 (1.7)	71 (2.0)	0.268
Received money or incentives for sex; n (%)	844 (18.0)	690 (19.4)	0.118
History of STI(s); n (%)	1,440 (30.8)	1,218 (34.2)	0.001
Number of sex partners within the past month; mean (SD)	2.6 (3.7)	2.8 (4.5)	0.040
HIVST positive; n (%)	188 (4.0)	90 (2.5)	<0.001
Linked to confirmatory testing and care; n (%)	113 (60.1)	51 (56.7)	0.204