

Trends in lifetime HIV testing among gay men and other men who have sex with men (MSM) in England and Wales: 1997-2008



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Overview

Using data drawn from an annual serial cross-sectional survey of gay men and other men that have sex with men in England and Wales, this poster explores changing patterns of HIV testing.

Introduction

Uptake of HIV testing has historically been very low in the UK, even among gay men and other men who have sex with men (MSM). There have been a range of interventions to encourage MSM to test for HIV in the last decade, including both policy changes in the health service and health promotion campaigns for MSM.

The *Gay Men's Sex Survey* (GMSS) is an annual, self-completion survey also known as *Vital Statistics*. The aims of the survey are:

- to assess the level and distribution of behaviours causing HIV transmission,
- the unmet prevention needs that contribute to those behaviours, and
- the reach of interventions intended to reduce those needs.



www.gmss.org.uk provides a single point of reference for all GMSS surveys since 1993.

It includes all the questionnaires used, feedback to respondents, published reports, journal articles and conference presentations associated with the survey.

Methods

The *Gay Men's Sex Survey* (GMSS) is part of CHAPS – the national programme of HIV prevention for MSM in England. CHAPS is funded by the Department of Health and co-ordinated by Terrence Higgins Trust.

GMSS is a short, anonymous survey for completion by men who have sex with men. More than 10,000 MSM took part in the survey each year from 1998 to 2008, either online or via booklet versions distributed by over 100 collaborating agencies.

GMSS is informed by the current interests of collaborating health promoters, within the CHAPS HIV prevention framework known as *Making it Count*. GMSS attempts to build a picture over time and is limited in the quantity of data that it is feasible to collect in each survey. Therefore while some questions appear every time, others are asked only every few years.

There were more than 150,000 GMSS surveys completed between 1997 and 2008. There was no GMSS in 2009, but it is part of the EMIS <www.emis-survey.eu> pan-European internet survey in the summer of 2010.

Every year from 1997-2008 men were asked: *Have you ever received an HIV test result?* and offered the responses:

- No, I've never tested
- Yes, I've tested positive
- Yes, my last test was negative.

In recent years men were also asked how recently they had tested for HIV.

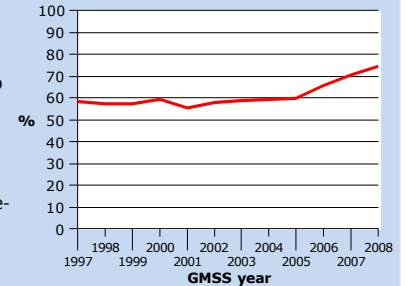
Conclusions

Efforts to encourage MSM to test for HIV in the UK have been successful. However, the proportion of MSM who have ever tested remains low compared to other Western European countries, Australia, Canada and the USA.

This serial cross-sectional data, together with evidence we gathered on the reasons for not testing, were fed into the programme planning for CHAPS, leading to further targeted national campaigns throughout 2009, examples of which are shown here.

Results: Changes in lifetime HIV testing

This chart (and the table below it) show the rate of lifetime testing in each GMSS survey sample from 1997 to 2008. It includes all MSM recruited to GMSS in each year who lived in England or Wales and had sex with a man in the last year.



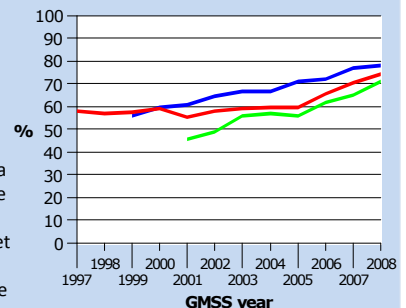
The graph takes no account of how men were recruited. It includes face-to-face recruitment at Pride-events from 1997 until 2001; booklet recruitment from 1999 to 2008 and internet recruitment from 2001 to 2008.

The data shows very limited change in the proportion of all men that have ever tested from 1997 to 2005 – when it hovered between 55% and 60%. However it shows a rise in the proportion that have ever tested during 2006, 2007 and 2008.

To minimise the potential for bias in this change analysis by changing patterns of recruitment to the survey we examine patterns of change in the booklet sample and the internet sample independently.

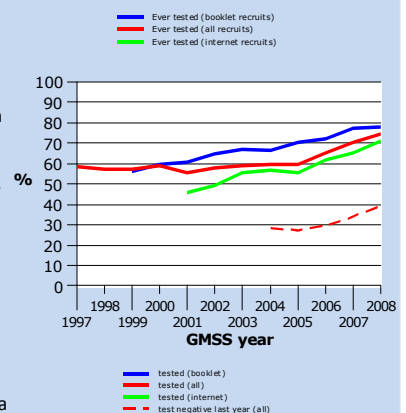
Year	% EVER tested (all respondents)
2008	74.5% (95% CI, 73.4 – 75.5)
2007	70.6% (95% CI, 69.4 – 71.8)
2006	65.7% (95% CI, 64.8 – 66.6)
2005	60.1% (95% CI, 59.3 – 60.9)
2004	59.8% (95% CI, 59.0 – 60.6)
2003	59.1% (95% CI, 58.2 – 60.0)
2002	58.3% (95% CI, 57.5 – 59.1)
2001	55.8% (95% CI, 55.0 – 56.6)
2000	59.5% (95% CI, 58.5 – 60.5)
1999	57.6% (95% CI, 56.6 – 58.6)
1998	57.4% (95% CI, 56.2 – 58.6)
1997	58.5% (95% CI, 57.0 – 60.0)

In the graph opposite, the blue line represents the percentage of booklet recruited MSM who had ever tested – the figures rise from 56% in 1999 to more than 78% in 2008.



The green line represents same data for internet recruited men only – the figures rise from 46% in 2001 to more than 71% in 2008. The internet samples are significantly less likely to have ever tested compared to the booklet samples.

The final graph shows the proportion of all men reporting a negative HIV test in the year before the survey. If the proportion of men who have never tested for HIV is falling year-to-year, then we would expect the proportion testing in the last year to be rising. This is precisely the change we observe.



While the proportion of all GMSS respondents tested negative in the last year did not change substantially from 2004 to 2006 (at about 30%), by 2008 this figure had risen to 39.3% of all men reporting a negative test in the previous year.

