

# ACCEPTABILITY OF SELF-COLLECTED THROAT SWABS AMONG GAY, BISEXUAL AND OTHER MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN ATTENDING A SEXUAL HEALTH CENTRE

Phillips TR<sup>1,2</sup>, Fairley CK<sup>1,2</sup>, Bradshaw C<sup>1,2</sup>, Maddaford K<sup>2</sup>, Rodriguez E<sup>2</sup>, Hall S<sup>2</sup>, Coulthard K<sup>1,2</sup>, Chow EPF<sup>1,2,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Central Clinical School, Monash University, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

<sup>2</sup> Melbourne Sexual Health Centre, Alfred Health, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

<sup>3</sup> Centre for Epidemiology and Biostatistics, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, The University of Melbourne, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

## Background:

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, sexual health clinics across Australia have switched from clinician-collected to self-collected swabs for oropharyngeal STI screening. The study aimed to determine the acceptability of self-collected throat swabs among 200 gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (GBMSM) attending a sexual health service.

## Methods:

GBMSM aged  $\geq 16$  years old, had a throat swab taken at the Melbourne Sexual Health Centre (MSHC), and provided consent to participate in research, were invited to take this online survey by SMS. Preliminary results of 105 men were presented.

## Results:

Of the 137 GBMSM who completed the survey, 105 (76.6%) self-collected their throat swab. Most participants found collecting their own throat swabs very easy, easy, or were neutral (89; 84.8%; 95% confidence interval [95%CI]: 76.4% to 91.0) and 15 (15.2%; 95%CI: 8.2% to 22.5%) found it difficult or very difficult. Most felt comfortable, very comfortable or neutral about taking their own throat swabs (76; 72.4%) and 29 (27.6%) were uncomfortable or very uncomfortable taking their own swab. There were 44 (41.9%) who reported taking the swab by themselves was worse than previous experiences of clinician-collected swabs, compared to 44 (41.9%) who reported it was better taking the swab by themselves or found no difference to previous clinician-collected swabs. The two most commonly reported experiences during self-collection were gagging (71; 67.6%) and tickling the throat (34; 32.4%). Twenty-six participants (24.8%) found it difficult to reach the throat. Over half of participants prefer to have a clinician take their throat swab (56; 53.3%; 95%CI: 43.3% to 63.1%); 28 (26.7%; CI: 18.5% to 36.2%) do not have a preference and 21 (20.0%; 95%CI: 12.8% to 28.9%) prefer to take the swab themselves.

## Conclusion:

Most GBMSM did not find self-collecting throat swabs difficult, however over half of participants preferred to have a clinician take the swab.

## Disclosure of Interest Statement:

None.