

A 'V shaped recovery' in HIV post-exposure prophylaxis during COVID-19 lockdown in Melbourne

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Background:

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Australian government introduced several lockdown measures in Victoria on March 23, 2020. It is hypothesized that casual sex might have reduced during the lockdown period. This study aimed to examine how these lockdown measures impacted HIV post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) prescriptions.

Methods:

This study was conducted at the Melbourne Sexual Health Centre (MSHC), a public sexual health service in Melbourne and remained to operate during the lockdown period. We examined the changes in weekly PEP prescriptions at MSHC before and during the COVID-19 lockdown period between January and May 2020.

Results:

There were 368 PEP prescriptions given to 346 individuals at MSHC between January and May 2020. The median age of individuals was 29 years (IQR 26-34) and most of them were men who have sex with men (95%; n=330). There were about 20-30 PEP prescriptions each week before lockdown (January 6 – March 22) but it decreased to 11 in the first week of lockdown (March 23–29) with a nadir of 2 PEP prescriptions in the fourth week of lockdown (April 13–19). However, the weekly number of PEP prescriptions gradually increased since late April and approached the levels before lockdown. Overall, there was a 66% reduction of PEP prescriptions four weeks before and after lockdown (from 88 prescriptions during February 24 – March 22, to 30 prescriptions during March 23 – April 19).

Conclusion:

Our data suggest that there was only a short-term reduction on PEP during the lockdown in Melbourne and it resumed to the level before lockdown after restrictions began to ease in mid-May.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

EPFC and CKF are each supported by an Australian NHMRC Investigator Grant (GNT1172873 for EPFC and GNT1172900 for CKF). JJO is supported by an NHRMC Early Career Fellowship (GNT1104781). JSH is supported by an NHMRC Senior Research Fellowship (GNT1136117). All other authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.