

FINDINGS FROM THE FIRST NATIONAL MIGRANT BLOOD-BORNE VIRUS AND SEXUAL HEALTH SURVEY 2020-2021

Vujcich D¹, Reid A¹, Brown G², Mao L³, Guy R⁴, Hartley L⁵, Mullens A⁶, Durham J⁷, Lobo R¹, Roberts M¹

¹School of Population Health, Curtin University, ²Centre for Social Impact, University of New South Wales, ³Centre for Social Research in Health, University of New South Wales, ⁴The Kirby Institute, ⁵Centre for Human Rights Education, Curtin University, ⁶University of Southern Queensland, ⁷Queensland University of Technology

Background: Migrants are a priority population for the prevention and control of sexually transmissible infections (STIs) and blood-borne viruses (BBVs) but are under-represented in research on the subject. The Migrant Blood-borne Virus and Sexual Health Survey (MiBSS) was the first national STI and BBV knowledge, attitudes, and practices survey collecting information from migrants in Australia.

Methods: An online and paper-based survey was developed, pretested, and administered to South-East Asian, North-East Asian, and Sub-Saharan African-born migrants in five Australian states between September 2020 and June 2021.

Results: The final sample comprised 1,465 migrants. Almost all respondents (94%) had heard of HIV but only one-third knew that HIV testing is not included in all blood tests. PrEP knowledge was low amongst respondents (15%).

Around one-quarter of respondents had heard of hepatitis B and understood what it was; however, of those, 56% thought the virus could be transmitted by contaminated food or water. Of respondents reporting knowing about hepatitis C, 27% knew there is a cure and 60% believed a vaccine was available.

56% of respondents whose last sexual encounter was with a casual partner reported using a condom. Amongst those reporting having sex during overseas travel since January 2018, 44% reported always condoms during those encounters.

Less than half of newly arrived migrants and sexually active migrants under the age of 30 were tested in accordance with ASHM National Testing Guidelines. When asked about their reaction to opportunistic testing, only 11% reported being 'offended' by the offer.

Conclusion: The findings suggest that interventions are needed to improve knowledge and awareness in this priority population, especially around HIV testing practices, PrEP awareness, the distinction between different forms of viral hepatitis, and the importance of condom use during casual sex and overseas travel. Health providers should be encouraged to increase offers of opportunistic testing.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

This project was funded by the Australian Research Council, with additional financial contributions from the Western Australian Department of Health, the South Australian Department of Health, the Victorian Department of Health, SHINE SA, and Curtin University. An ASHM Sexual Health Research Grant was also obtained to extend the project to Queensland.