

# HIV PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS (PREP) USE AMONG HIV-NEGATIVE GAY AND BISEXUAL MEN WHO USE ILLICIT PARTY DRUGS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC.

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## Background:

Prior to the availability of HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), HIV negative gay and bisexual men (GBM) who used illicit party drugs (ecstasy, methamphetamine, cocaine, gamma-hydroxybutyrate, and ketamine) were more likely to engage in condomless anal intercourse with casual partners (CLAIC) and subsequent HIV infection. However, PrEP uptake has been high among this population.

We investigate whether HIV negative GBM who use illicit party drugs continued to use PrEP throughout the COVID-19 pandemic in Australia.

## Methods:

Between May 2020 and April 2021, GBM completed up to 12 monthly surveys and responded to questions about PrEP use, CLAIC, and illicit party drugs. We describe trends over time and use chi-square tests to determine whether men who used illicit party drugs used PrEP when they engaged in CLAIC and whether they did so more or less than did men who did not use illicit party drugs.

## Results:

Analysis was restricted to 234 non-HIV positive GBM who engaged in CLAIC. Mean age was 46.7 years (SD: 14.2). Between May-2020 and April-2021, prevalence of illicit party drug use increased from 15.7% to 27.3%. PrEP use varied little over time: While most men used PrEP, use was consistently higher among GBM who used illicit party drugs: 85.0% vs 73.3% in May 2020 ( $p=0.228$ ); 93.8% vs 72.7% in September 2020 ( $p=0.013$ ); 93.3% vs 80.5% in February 2021 ( $p=0.003$ ); 90.0% vs 80.5% in April 2021 ( $p=0.231$ ).

## Conclusion:

Illicit party drug use steadily increased since May 2020. While PrEP use remained high among HIV negative GBM who engaged in CLAIC throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, including GBM who used illicit party drugs.

A small proportion of drug using men reported engaging in CLAIC without PrEP.

These findings challenge the notion that GBM using illicit party drugs engage in HIV-risk, even during uncertain times during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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