

# PREFERENCES FOR CONDUCTING ANAL SELF-EXAMINATION TO DETECT SYPHILIS AMONG MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN IN AUSTRALIA: A DISCRETE CHOICE EXPERIMENT

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**Background:** With the ongoing epidemic of syphilis among men who have sex with men (MSM), additional strategies to improve control of syphilis are warranted. Studies suggest regular 3-monthly sexually transmitted infections screening might not be adequate to detect early syphilis infection and that anorectal primary lesions are likely to be missed. Regular anal self-examination (ASE) could potentially reduce transmission if anal syphilis were detected earlier by ASE. This study aimed to examine the preferences of MSM on performing ASE to detect anal syphilis.

**Methods:** We conducted an online anonymous survey with discrete choice experiment between July and November 2020. The survey was distributed through Melbourne Sexual Health Centre and social media. MSM aged  $\geq 18$  years and living in Australia were eligible. We examined the preferred attributes of ASE for anal syphilis: frequency, type of support if abnormalities were found, speed/time for medical review for abnormal findings, instruction of ASE, accuracy of ASE for detection of syphilis.

**Results:** A total of 574 MSM completed the survey: median age was 34 [IQR 27-45]), 183 (32%) had previously performed ASE. The choice to perform ASE was most influenced by accuracy of examination, followed by frequency of ASE, type of instruction, speed/time for medical review, and type of support received if abnormalities were found respectively. The most preferred ASE is one that is very accurate (100%), conducted once a month, online video instructions, and same day review service with a nurse if an abnormality was initially detected.

**Conclusion:** If ASE were to be recommended for anal syphilis screening, it is important that we design a recommendation that is feasible, effective and meets the needs and preferences of MSM. For men in this study, accuracy of the examination was the most important factor to decide performing anal self-examination. Further studies are required to explore the effectiveness of ASE.

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