

Piloting HIV Self-Test distribution by Smart Vending Machine

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Background/Purpose:

Men who have sex with men (MSM) can face a number of barriers to HIV testing, including cost, privacy concerns, and inconvenient times and locations. Delivery of HIV Self-Tests (HST) has been shown to be an effective and equitable testing strategy, reaching people at high risk of HIV. Providing access to HSTs in familiar, discrete and safe locations may reduce some of the testing barriers making it more accessible. We wanted to know whether the provision of HSTs via strategically located vending machines (VM) could help us reach MSM who did not regularly test using traditional testing modalities.

Approach:

Following a literature review we ran a pilot programme at Auckland's busiest Sex On Premise Venue (SOPV). A smart VM, with a touch screen and cloud-based vending software was installed at the SOPV in November 2019. Along with basic demographics, users needed to provide a verifiable email or phone number for follow-up for confirmatory testing and further linkage to care if positive. After receiving the HST, users received an SMS or email with a link to provide their result and to complete a post-test evaluation survey. If no response was received two reminders were sent out.

Outcomes/Impact:

The VM has been in operation for 7 months (excluding COVID-19 interruptions). During this time, 162 HSTs were dispensed. Of these, 13% indicated that they had not tested within the last 12 months and 7% had never tested for HIV. The ethnic breakdown showed that 40% identified as Asian, (compared to 28% at NZAF clinics and 21% in the HST online distribution programme), and 11% identified as Māori (compared to 5% at NZAF clinics and 11% in the HST online distribution programme). Overall, 35% completed the post-test evaluation and provided their result – to date, no users have reported a preliminary positive result. The qualitative feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

Innovation and Significance:

Preliminary results are promising. The programme seeks further expansion with more VMs due to be installed in other locations. Novel approaches may be needed to improve the follow-up rate.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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