

Changing the use of HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis among men who have sex with men during the COVID-19 pandemic in Melbourne, Australia

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Background:

The Victorian Government implemented two lockdown measures to tackle the COVID-19 pandemic. The first one began in March and eased in May, while the second one began in July. We assessed the use of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and sexual practices among men who have sex with men (MSM) taking PrEP during the first and second lockdowns.

Methods:

We conducted two cross-sectional online surveys in May and August 2020, respectively, among MSM who had their PrEP managed at the Melbourne Sexual Health Centre (MSHC). Both surveys aimed to investigate how MSM used PrEP before and during lockdown. We examined the reasons why MSM changed PrEP use during the first lockdown. We also examined the changes in sexual practice and use of face mask during the second lockdown.

Results:

There were 204 and 192 completed the first and second surveys. Among daily PrEP users, 73% (95%CI: 66-79%) and 80% (95%CI: 73-85%) continued to use daily PrEP during the first and second lockdown, respectively. Of those who reduced or stopped PrEP during the first lockdown, most men reported they stopped engaging in casual sex during lockdown (87%; 95%CI: 75-95%). During the second lockdown in July-August, men generally reported that they had no partners or decreased sexual activities during the second lockdown compared with post first lockdown in May-June; the number of casual sex partners (43% decreased vs 3% increased) and the number of kissing partners (36% decreased vs 3% increased). Most men reported no chemsex (79%) and group sex (77%) in May-August. Of the 127 who reported any sexual contacts in May-August, 13 (10%) men had ever used a face mask during sex.

Conclusion:

During the two lockdowns in Victoria, most men did not change the way they used PrEP but the majority had no risks or reduced sexual practices.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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