

High acceptability of online sexually transmitted and blood-borne infection (STBBI) testing for sexual minority men living in Ontario, Canada

Joshun Dulai, Mark Gilbert, Nathan Lachowsky, Kiffer Card, Ben Klassen, Ann Burchell, Catherine Worthington, Aidan Ablona, Praney Anand, Ezra Blaque, Heeho Ryu, MacKenzie Stewart, David J. Brennan, and Daniel Grace*

*For more Information about this study, please contact: joshun.dulai@mail.utoronto.ca or daniel.grace@utoronto.ca

Background

- Compared to heterosexuals, gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (GBM) are disproportionately affected by sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBIs)
- The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated barriers to accessing in-person clinical services experienced by GBM such as distance to sexual health clinics and limited hours for STBBI testing
- Online STBBI testing addresses these barriers, however it is not available in Ontario
- We assessed acceptability of online STBBI testing, barriers to clinic-based STBBI testing, and the perceived benefits and drawbacks of this service among GBM living in Ontario

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Methods

- Sex Now 2019 was an online national bilingual cross-sectional survey of GBM aged ≥ 15 conducted from November 2019 to February 2020
- Participants were asked on a 5-point scale (very likely – never) how likely would they use an online STBBI testing service
- Participants were also asked to select their reasons for delaying STBBI testing and their perceived benefits and drawbacks in using online STBBI testing

Results (n=2375)

Figure 1. Reasons for Delaying STBBI Testing

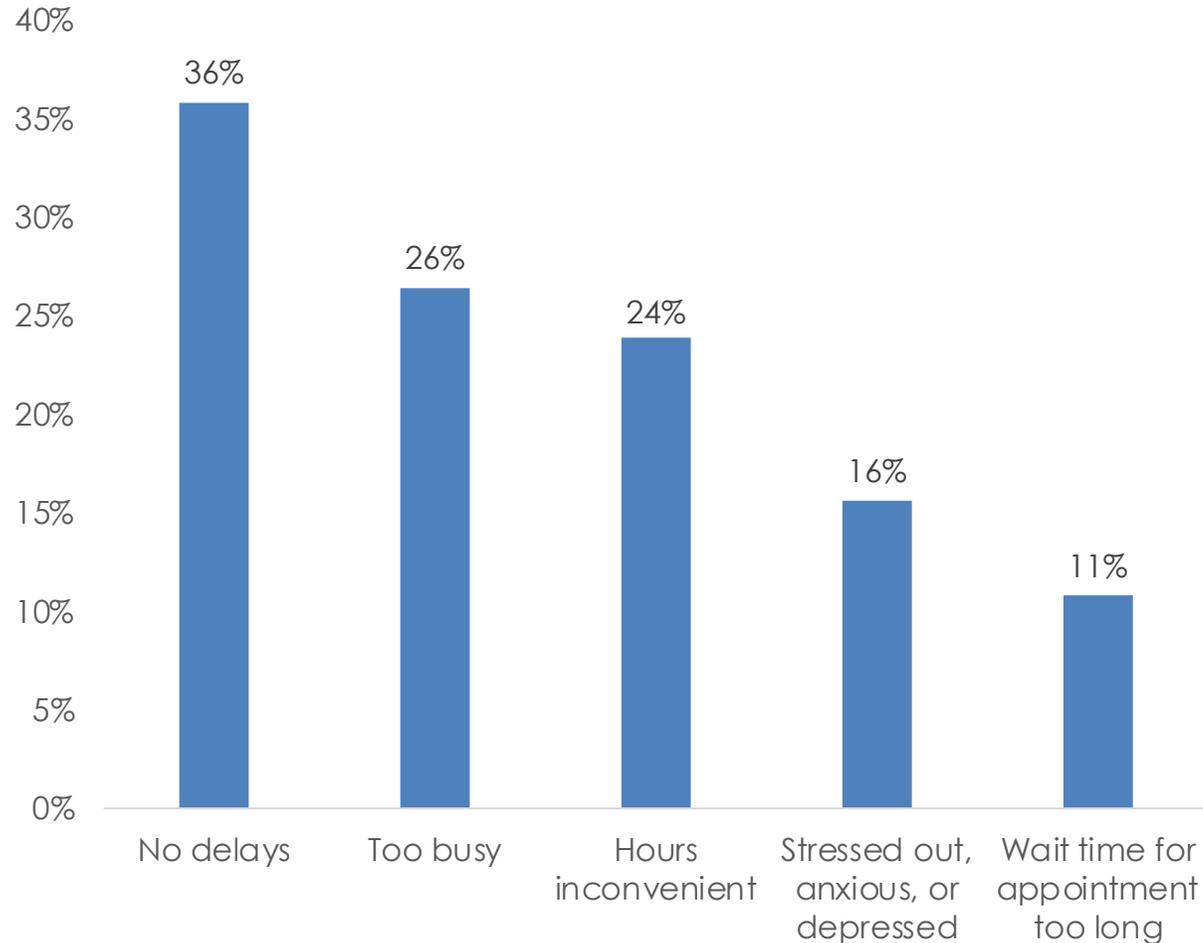


Table 1. Acceptability of Online STBBI Testing

Likelihood	n (%)	n (%)
Very Likely	1142 (48%)	1871 (79%)
Likely	729 (31%)	
Unlikely	224 (10%)	484 (20%)
Very unlikely	105 (4%)	
Never	155 (7%)	

Results (n=2375)

Figure 2. Benefits of Online STBBI Testing

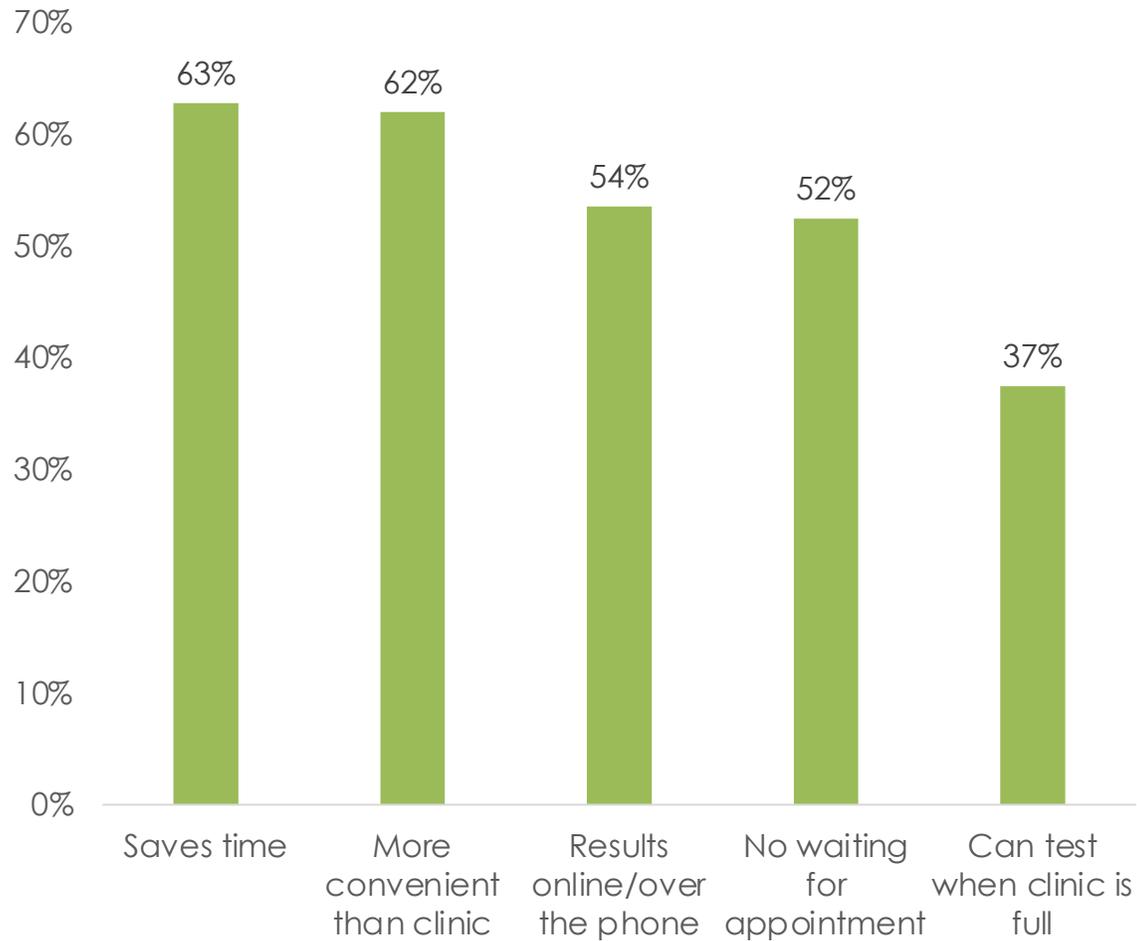
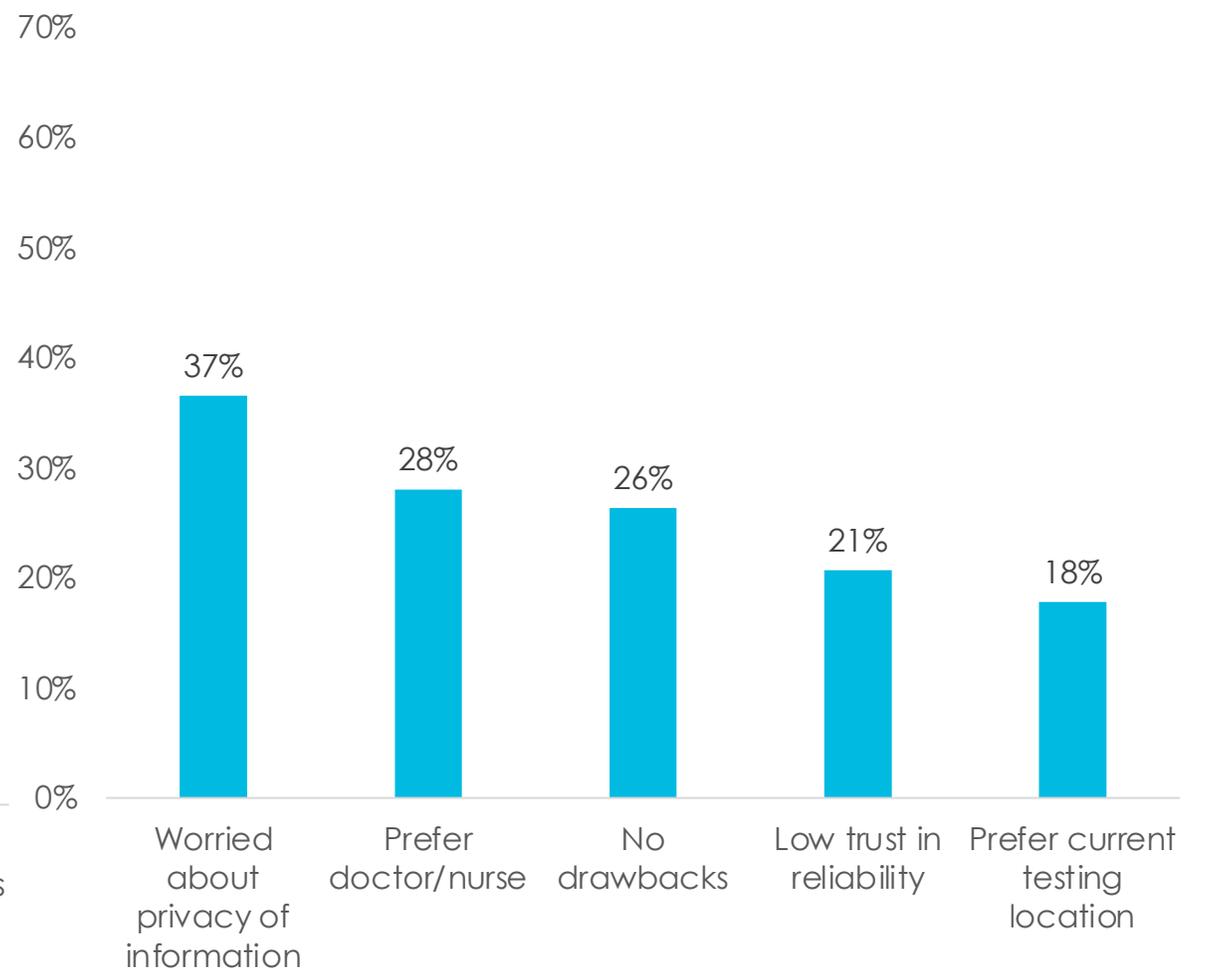


Figure 3. Drawbacks of Online STBBI Testing



Discussion and Conclusion

- The Ontario sample included n=2375 GBM (median age: 38, 75% gay, 8% transgender, 44% single)
- A third of participants reported no delays in testing for STBBIs, however many did delay testing with the four most common reasons being: too busy; inconvenient clinic hours; being too stressed, anxious, and/or depressed to go get tested; and long wait times for an appointment at sexual health clinics
- Acceptability of online STBBI testing was high with a majority of participants reporting that they would be either likely or very likely to use this service
- Many participants agreed that there are benefits in using an online STBBI testing service such as saving time and finding it more convenient than a sexual health clinic, however privacy of one's personal information was the primary concern in using the service
- Based on our findings, implementation of online STBBI testing in Ontario may address some of the barriers GBM face in accessing clinic based testing in the province
- Online STBBI testing already exists in British Columbia, and as the testing landscape shifts from in-person to online (particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic), online STBBI testing would provide an additional way of meeting the testing needs of GBM, and could reduce the burden of STBBIs in this population over time

For more information about the Digital Sexual Health Initiative, please visit this link: <https://dishiresearch.ca/>