

Factors related to PrEP awareness and use among men who have sex with men in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver

WHY DID WE RESEARCH THIS TOPIC?

- Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) – which involves an HIV-negative person taking HIV treatment to protect themselves from infection – is a highly effective strategy to reduce HIV transmission.
- However, the high cost of PrEP limits the ability of gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men (GBM) to access the treatment.
- We wanted to find out what factors made GBM more or less likely to access PrEP, including whether the treatment is covered by public drug insurance in their province.



Access to PrEP varies across Canadian provinces. While BC provides free access to PrEP, Ontario and Quebec only cover the cost of PrEP in limited circumstances.

HOW DID WE RESEARCH THIS?

- Between 2017 and 2019, we asked 2,008 GBM in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver to answer a questionnaire about their knowledge and use of PrEP, access to health services, sexual history and risk of infection with HIV and other STIs.
- Every 6 to 12 months, we checked in to see if more guys in the study became aware of PrEP or began using the treatment.
- Over time, we compared the characteristics of guys who already knew about PrEP to those who didn't, and the characteristics of guys who had accessed PrEP in the past to those who hadn't.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

- By 2020, guys in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver had higher odds of using PrEP in the past compared to 2017. About 2 in 5 guys who had heard of PrEP accessed the treatment. However, more guys in Vancouver (about 3 in 5) accessed PrEP than in Montreal or Toronto.
- Having private insurance also increased guys' likelihood of accessing PrEP.
- Guys were about twice as likely to use PrEP if they met the PrEP clinical criteria for high-risk infection or had condomless sex with a partner whose HIV status was positive or unknown.
- Twice as many guys who were ever diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection had taken PrEP in the past
- Less guys who reported feeling at high risk of HIV accessed PrEP compared to guys who reported feeling at low risk.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THESE FINDINGS?

- GBM in Vancouver (where PrEP is fully free-of-charge) were more likely to use PrEP compared to GBM in Montreal and Toronto. In the years since PrEP became freely available, BC and other regions have seen decreases in new HIV infections.
- Publicly funding PrEP for GBM can encourage more guys to protect themselves from HIV. However, to make sure the treatment reaches guys at highest risk of HIV, healthcare providers should be prepared to discuss PrEP with their patients, regardless of how at-risk their patients feel.

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