

Home Testing Kits Survey

January 2011

Background

Home testing for HIV is currently illegal in the UK. However, home testing kits are available over the internet. They are unregulated, often of very poor quality and lack essential information on HIV transmission and where to get support. Reliable home testing technology will shortly become available and approved in the United States. THT supports the legalisation and regulation of HIV home testing kits in the UK so that people can have the choice to test for HIV safely and securely in their own home.

Previous research found that 0.5% of gay men had used a home testing kit despite the existing ban and just under 6% would prefer to test in this way in future¹. However, there has been little further exploration of demand for home testing and whether there is public support for a change in the law, particularly amongst those at risk of HIV and those who have been diagnosed with HIV. THT therefore carried out this survey to consider patient choice in the debate over legalising home testing kits.

You can read THT's full briefing explaining why we support the legalisation and regulation of HIV home testing kits here: <http://www.tht.org.uk/binarylibrary/hometesting.pdf>

Who did we survey?

657 people were surveyed via newsletters, Facebook, Twitter and other online media. We were particularly interested in hearing the views of people living with HIV and those at risk of HIV infection.

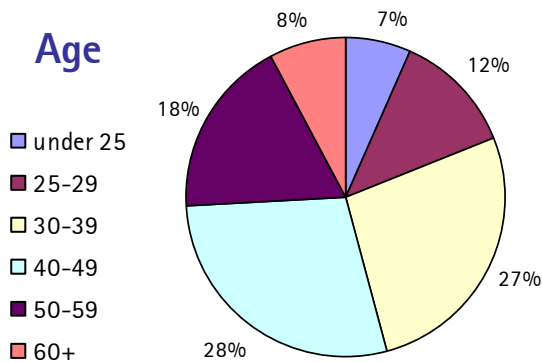
75% of respondents were not diagnosed with HIV and about half were gay men. The HIV negative and untested respondents were asked about whether availability of home testing kits would affect their testing behaviour as well as their views on legalisation.

25% of respondents (167 people) were people living with HIV. We asked them separate questions, including whether they thought they would have tested for HIV earlier if home testing kits were available. We also wanted to know whether they thought home testing would be acceptable, given that they have personal experience of receiving a positive HIV result.

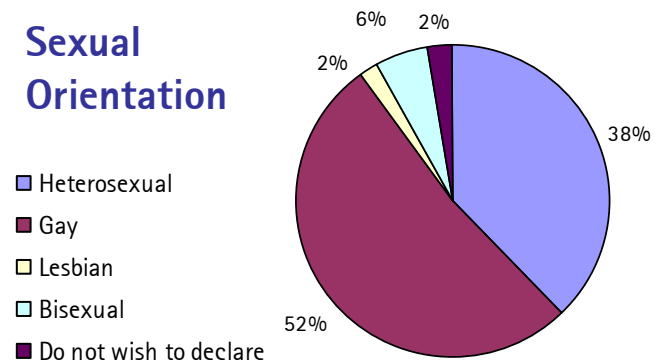
¹ *UK Gay Mens Sex Survey 2008*, Sigma Research

Breakdown of survey respondents

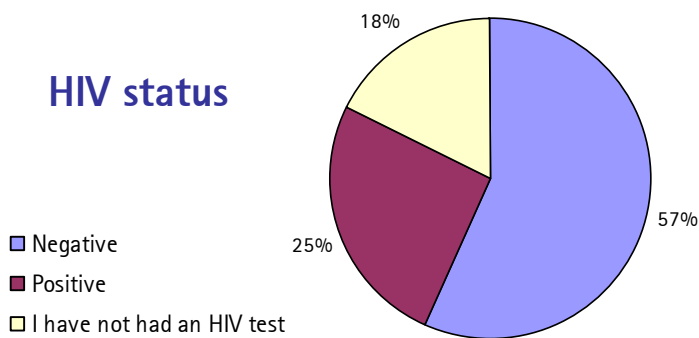
Age



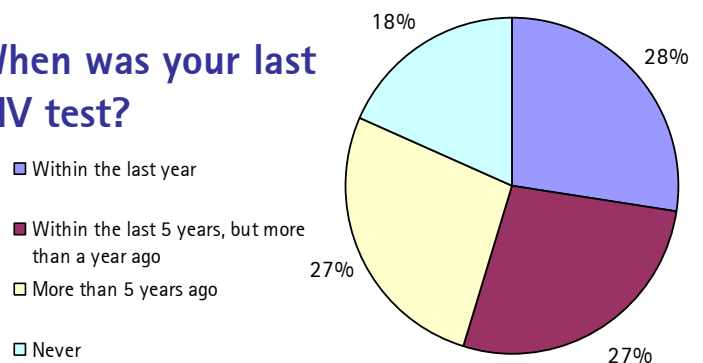
Sexual Orientation



HIV status



When was your last HIV test?



Demand for Home Testing Kits

The survey found demand for HIV home testing kits, particularly from gay men. Most people who were not diagnosed with HIV said they would consider using home testing kits and a majority would test for HIV more often if kits were available.

Over a third of respondents with HIV thought that they would have been diagnosed earlier if kits had been available, with a higher number amongst those who were diagnosed late. This suggests that legalising home testing could help to reduce levels of undiagnosed and late diagnosed HIV.

63% of people who last tested negative for HIV or had never tested would consider using HIV home testing kits if they were legally available and regulated in the UK.

51% think it would make them test for HIV more often.

3% had used a home testing kit before which would have been unregulated and bought illegally.

65% of gay men would consider using a home testing kit.

60% think they would test more often if home testing kits were legally available.

35% of respondents with HIV thought they may have been diagnosed earlier if home testing kits were available.

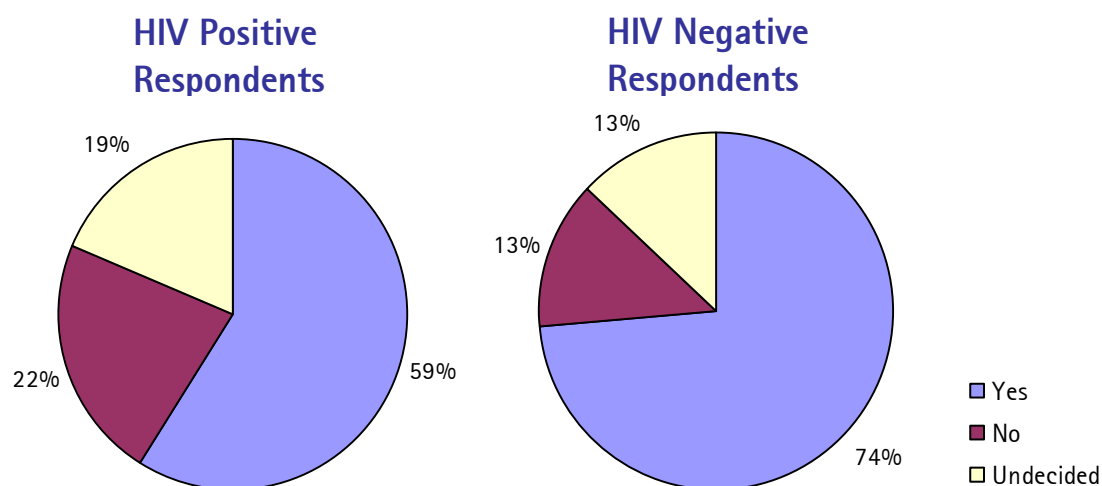
This rose to **44%** amongst those who were diagnosed late (with a CD4 count of less than 350 cells/mm).

Support for legalisation of home testing

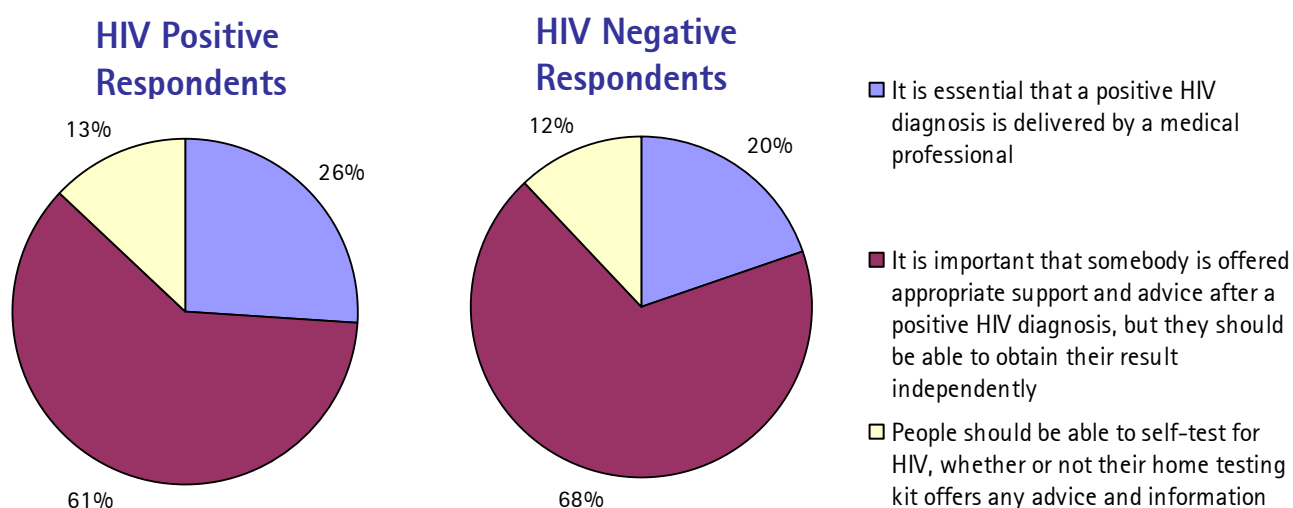
65% of all respondents want home testing kits to be legalised and regulated in the UK.

Support was highest amongst HIV negative and untested gay men - **78%** were in favour of legalisation. A majority of both HIV negative and HIV positive respondents were in favour of legalisation, and agreed with the principle that people should be able to get tested independently as long as support and advice is made available.

Do you think home testing kits for HIV should be legalised and regulated in the UK for those who want to use them?



Which of the following statements do you most agree with?



Comments from survey respondents

Most comments expressed support for legalising home testing kits to increase testing options, particularly

for those who want to test regularly but find current options inconvenient. Those with reservations typically were concerned that home testing kits provide adequate signposting to support services, especially if somebody has a positive result.

"I think people should have the freedom and option to have access to home testing for HIV. HIV is still here and this is one way that people can find out their status and do something about it."

"Home testing kits would particularly help those who live out of major urban centres and presumably come with basic information to improve knowledge about the current state of HIV"

"For HIV discordant couples home testing would alleviate the stress of attending a clinic for testing, it could encourage more regular testing and it would certainly remove the worry associated with an unknown health status."

"I am a nurse involved in HIV testing. I have recently had a client who did a home test that was positive but the rapid test at the clinic showed negative. The client said he had purchased the test from Malaysia"

"I think home testing kits are a great idea, but they should be very carefully regulated to minimise risk of inaccurate results, and very carefully outline support options and next steps in the case of a positive result."

Conclusion

If legalised in the UK, HIV home testing could be an acceptable choice for many individuals, particularly those at risk of infection, and could increase testing behaviours and reduce rates of undiagnosed and late diagnosed HIV. There is broad support for legalisation of HIV home testing amongst gay men, and people with and without HIV. However, proper regulation is seen as vital by many to ensure that home testing kits contain information and sources of further support.

If you would like any further information on this survey or THT's campaign for the legalisation of home testing for HIV, please contact Guy Slade, THT's Parliamentary Officer, by emailing guy.slade@tht.org.uk or phoning 020 7812 1631