



HIV Testing Targeting MSM in Non-traditional Settings in New Orleans



Objectives

The NO/AIDS Task Force provides free, rapid HIV Anti-body screening in non-traditional settings where Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) congregate to help increase knowledge of HIV status and access to care for those who are infected.

MSM contribute to the highest proportion of new HIV diagnoses nationally and locally:

- In 2007, 68% of new HIV diagnoses in the New Orleans Area and 60% in Louisiana were among MSM
- In 2005, national CDC data concluded that MSM made up 53% of new HIV diagnoses
- More than 60% of HIV positive MSM in New Orleans live in the French Quarter and Marigny area, where Venue Based Outreach and Testing occur
- The CDC acknowledges that HIV infection among young MSM continues to rise annually
 - Rates increased 12% in MSM ages 13-24 from 2001 to 2006

These statistics emphasize that HIV is still greatly impacting the MSM community and innovative interventions must be incorporated into HIV prevention and referral.

Methods

Nine times a month, staff and volunteers from the NO/AIDS Task Force go to sites in the French Quarter area of New Orleans to provide free, rapid HIV Testing.

- Prior to initiating testing at a Bar, Bath house or other non-traditional site:
- The Venue must agree to allow testing to occur and decide on a time/day for testing to regularly occur
 - The Louisiana Office of Public Health HIV/AIDS Program must approve the site.
 - A specific site number is assigned to ensure proper reporting.

- The following is the general process for Venue Based Testing:
- All supplies are carried in a travel bag and HIV controls in a miniature cooler.
 - Outreach occurs before and during event to let patrons and passersby of the available service
 - Testing area is set up to maintain confidentiality of clients and to follow Louisiana protocol for rapid testing
 - Clients are escorted upstairs or to the area for testing (other patrons are not allowed in these areas during testing times)
 - Counselors assess clients' ability to receive results that day and proceed with testing
 - Clients receive their results and appropriate referrals

Results

Testing in these non-traditional settings has proven to be an effective way to identify new positives and link clients to appropriate care.

- During January to December, 2007:
- NO/AIDS tested 176 MSM in bars and bathhouses
 - Eight, or 4.5%, were confirmed, new positives
 - Only one of the new positives, who was from out of state, was not directly linked to HIV care

- From January to November 5th, 2008:
- NO/AIDS tested 215 MSM in non-traditional settings
 - Six, or 2.8%, have had preliminary positives results
 - All were referred to Case Management and Primary Medical Care at the NO/AIDS Task Force

Testing in these locations is also a way to inform MSM of the risks of HIV and give them the tools (negotiation skills, condoms etc) to keep themselves safe.

- Challenges:
- Assessing a client's readiness to receive positive results in a non-traditional setting
 - Providing appropriate referrals and follow-up to out of state clients
 - Dealing with patrons who do not want the services offered at that location while they are there to 'enjoy themselves.'

Conclusions

Providing testing in locations familiar and easily accessible to MSM such as bars and bathhouses helps a high risk population get tested and linked to care. Challenges exist in implementing a successful venue based testing program, but with the community's desire and involvement for HIV testing, the agency is able to surmount these barriers. The program remains well received and is seen as essential by many.

The NO/AIDS Task force helps to remind individuals of the importance of routine HIV testing and regularly refers many clients to additional services, including:

- STD Screening at local, free clinic
- Re:Vision (NO/AIDS Mpowerment Program) referrals made to MSM between ages 18 and 35
- Safer Sex Packets distributed (consisting of condoms, lube packets, information on testing and STIs)

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