

Widespread support for rapid HIV testing in dental surgeries

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More than 80 per cent of oral health patients are willing to receive rapid HIV-testing in dental settings, which could help reduce the spread of the HIV according to a groundbreaking study revealed today at a Sydney University HIV Testing Symposium.

The first of its kind study of 521 Sydney-based dental patients assessed patients' willingness to undergo rapid HIV testing in dental settings, their preference for HIV testing-type type and their willingness to pay for the test.

Rapid HIV testing is a screening test that swiftly detects the presence of HIV antibodies in a person's body by testing blood or oral fluids.

It can be done as a simple finger prick or a saliva swab, and results can be made available within 20 minutes.

Rapid HIV testing is currently unavailable in dental settings anywhere in the world although the technology has been widely available for a decade.

Australians will soon be able to access rapid HIV-testing themselves after the federal government last week announced that it had lifted restrictions preventing the manufacture and sale of oral home-testing kits.

"Dentists are well placed to offer rapid HIV testing because they're

located throughout the community, have ongoing relationships with their patients, and have the necessary training and expertise to recognise systemic diseases that have oral manifestations, such as HIV/AIDS," says the study's lead author, Dr Anthony Santella of the University of Sydney.

The new research finding has important policy implications, according to Dr Santella: "If rapid HIV testing was widely available in dental settings it could help to reduce the spread of the virus by informing people who aren't aware that they are HIV-positive.

"It's important that policymakers and other stakeholders consider expanding rapid HIV testing beyond medical and sexual health clinics because the average time from HIV infection to diagnosis in Australia is currently more than three years."

"As well, we have fresh evidence that around 45 per cent of dentists feel prepared and willing to perform rapid HIV-testing. This means it would be feasible to offer rapid HIV testing through dental settings, especially in targeted at risk communities."

Among those saying they'd be willing to undergo rapid HIV testing in a dental setting, 76 per cent preferred an oral saliva swab, 15 per cent preferred a pin prick test, and eight per cent preferred a traditional blood [test](#) that draws blood through a needle.

Provided by University of Sydney

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