

HIV testing at gay bathhouses in Barcelona, Spain.

Garcia de Olalla P1, Carrasco MG2, Martín S2, Ros M1, Santomà MJ1, Moreno A, Diez E, Caylà JA and Study Saunas Group *
Epidemiology Service. Public Health Agency of Barcelona (Spain)

Background and Objective

Unprotected sex in men who have sex with men (MSM) in bathhouses continues to happen in most urban areas. In Barcelona 44% of the MSM had a CD4 count below 350 cells/ μ l upon HIV diagnosis.

The aim of this study was to determine the incidence of new HIV diagnoses and to describe the characteristics of the individuals who underwent a rapid HIV test at four gay bathhouses in Barcelona during 2007-2009.

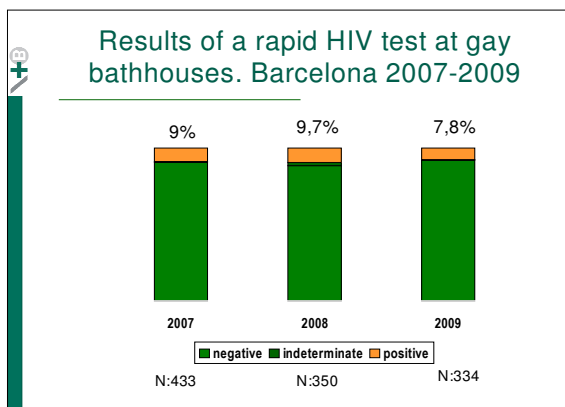
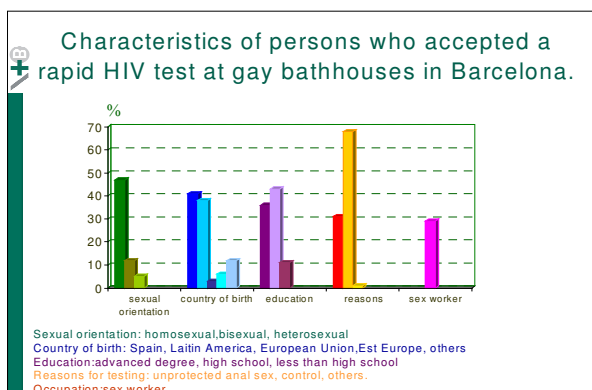
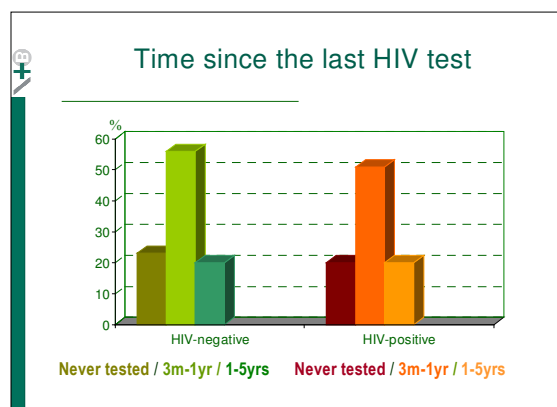
Methods

A voluntary rapid HIV testing and hepatitis A and B vaccination program has been implemented at four gay bathhouses in Barcelona since 2006. Participants were given HIV pre-test counseling and testing in the bathhouses. The results and post-test counseling were given at the Public Health Agency of Barcelona (ASPB) the day after the intervention. In addition to HIV testing, behavioral and demographic data were collected from presumed HIV-negative participants and linked to HIV antibody test results by a nonidentifying code. Bathhouse costumers with reactive positive test results were referred to a hospital for confirmation and control.

Descriptive analyses were performed using SPSS version 13.

Results

- 433 men were tested in 2007, 350 in 2008 and 334 in 2009. Median age was 32 years old (range:18-78). 41% were born in Spain and 43% had high school or equivalent.
- 527 (47%) identified themselves as homosexuals, 128 (12%) as bisexuals, 51 (5%) as heterosexuals, 411 (37%) did not answer.
- The primary reason for testing at the visit was as a measure of control in 68% of the cases. 31% reported having had unprotected anal sex.
- 9% of the men tested were HIV-positive in 2007, 9,7% in 2008 and 7,8% in 2009.
- 81% of the positive test and 89% of the negative test received their results. 100% of the positive test received their results in 2009.
- Median CD4 lymphocyte count (58 cases) was 475 cells/ μ l., 28% was below 350 cells.
- 20% of the reactive test individuals and 23% of the negative test individuals had never tested before.



Conclusions

The program reached out to a great percentage of men who had never been tested in medical settings and who were at high risk of HIV infection. Incidence of a new HIV diagnosis was higher than the incidence found in other settings. The proportion of patients with CD4 below 350 cells/ μ l was lower than the proportion found through the epidemiological surveillance system. Bathhouse-based testing to detect HIV infection in these venues seems to be a good strategy to reduced transmission of HIV in this population.