

Home testing and HIV prevention

- a starting point for a discussion

Wednesday 9. July 2014 Luxembourg

In the last meeting in the Think tank Norway, along with other countries, was asked to write a paper who could be a starting point for a discussion on hiv home testing. We understood the task to be a paper on how the health governments should conduct it self to the fact that home test kits are now available on the internet.

The paper was prepared with input from different departments within the Norwegian Directorate of Health, two NGOs working with hiv prevention, Aksept and Gay and Lesbian Health Norway, and the Institute of Public Health

Pro...

- Home testing are convenient, it can be taken in privacy and safeguard a persons anonymity
- Home testing can empower individuals to manage their HIV risks
- Availability of a rapid home HIV test could increase rates of disease detection in communities that have proven difficult to reach
- Legalization of HIV home testing in Europe could enable more control over the type and quality of tests that are being distributed

Home testing are convenient, it can be taken in privacy and safeguard a persons anonymity. Home testing can therefore address three important barriers to wider HIV test acceptance: stigma, convenience, and privacy

Advocates of HIV home testing argue that there is value in empowering individuals to manage their HIV risks and have suggested that the availability of a rapid home HIV test could increase rates of disease detection in communities that have proven difficult to reach and to link to appropriate care.

Another positive aspect of the legalization of HIV home testing in Europe is that it could enable more control over the type and quality of tests that are being distributed. Legal or not, people can already order tests online. The legalization of HIV home testing would enable the production and sale of CE marked products that have been assessed for quality, safety and reliability and that provide instructions in European languages

...et contra

- Poor quality home testing kits can have the effect of increasing both false-positive and false-negative results
- Tests substitutes for condoms?
- Costly HIV tests will predominantly attract a affluent clientele
- Lack of psychological support if tested positiv
- Lack of linkage between test and care

Poor quality and difficulties with managing to take the test (as the paper from Germany describes) can have the effect of increasing both false-positive and false-negative results. False positive results could cause substantial psychological distress whereas, false negative results, which may be obtained during the window between infection and seroconversion, could provide a false sense of security and potentially promote risky behavior.

Research also suggests that HIV home testing, especially if costly, will attract a predominantly affluent clientele, composed disproportionately of HIV-uninfected new couples and “worried well” persons, as well as very recently infected persons with undetectable disease.

There are seriously concern about the potentially destructive individual reactions that could occur upon a positive result, especially if the user learns their HIV status alone.

Ultimately, the real issue is not the availability of another HIV test but the linking of persons with HIV infection to lifesaving care.

Home testing today

- Home testing have been available in USA since 1996
- UK and France have legalized home tests from 2014
- Germany and Switzerland do not authorize home test
- Rest of Europe?

Home testing – a Norwegian preliminary conclusion

- HIV home tests are already widely available online. The question is therefore not so much about whether or not to authorize them, but more about how to control the conditions of their development
- Attention on the packaging of the home tests
- Home tests must not become a permanent and systematic substitutes to STI screening in traditional healthcare settings which provides free access, maximum reliability, readily available counselling and direct link to care
- Learn from evaluations from other countries

HIV home tests are already widely available online. The question is therefore not so much about whether or not to authorize, them but more about how to control the conditions of their development.

Attention on the packaging of the home tests are crucial. The educational material attached to the kits would have to be written in the relevant language, value the decision of the user to know their own HIV status, recommend not to test oneself alone, provide instructions for test use and result interpretation, indicate other alternatives for anonymous HIV testing, offer contact with professional and peer-to-peer counselling and emotional support, prepare the user mentally for the implications of a positive result, inform the user that one can nowadays live well and long with HIV and explain how to proceed in case of a positive test