

STI and HIV testing to break the chain of infection – local innovation in the midst of COVID-19

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Background

- We are a large network of contraception, sexual health and HIV clinics in North West England, covering a population area of 1.2 million people
- Pre-COVID, on average, our clinics:
 - undertake 3600 sexual health screens per month
 - process 1100 home test kits (HTK) per month
- The lockdown in England in March 2020 resulted in the cessation of routine asymptomatic screening, and therefore left many patients untested
- The move towards the initial easing of lockdown in June presented a unique opportunity to test high risk individuals at a time when their sexual risk-taking behaviour was likely to be at its lowest and when they were at the end of infection window periods, thus breaking the chain of infection

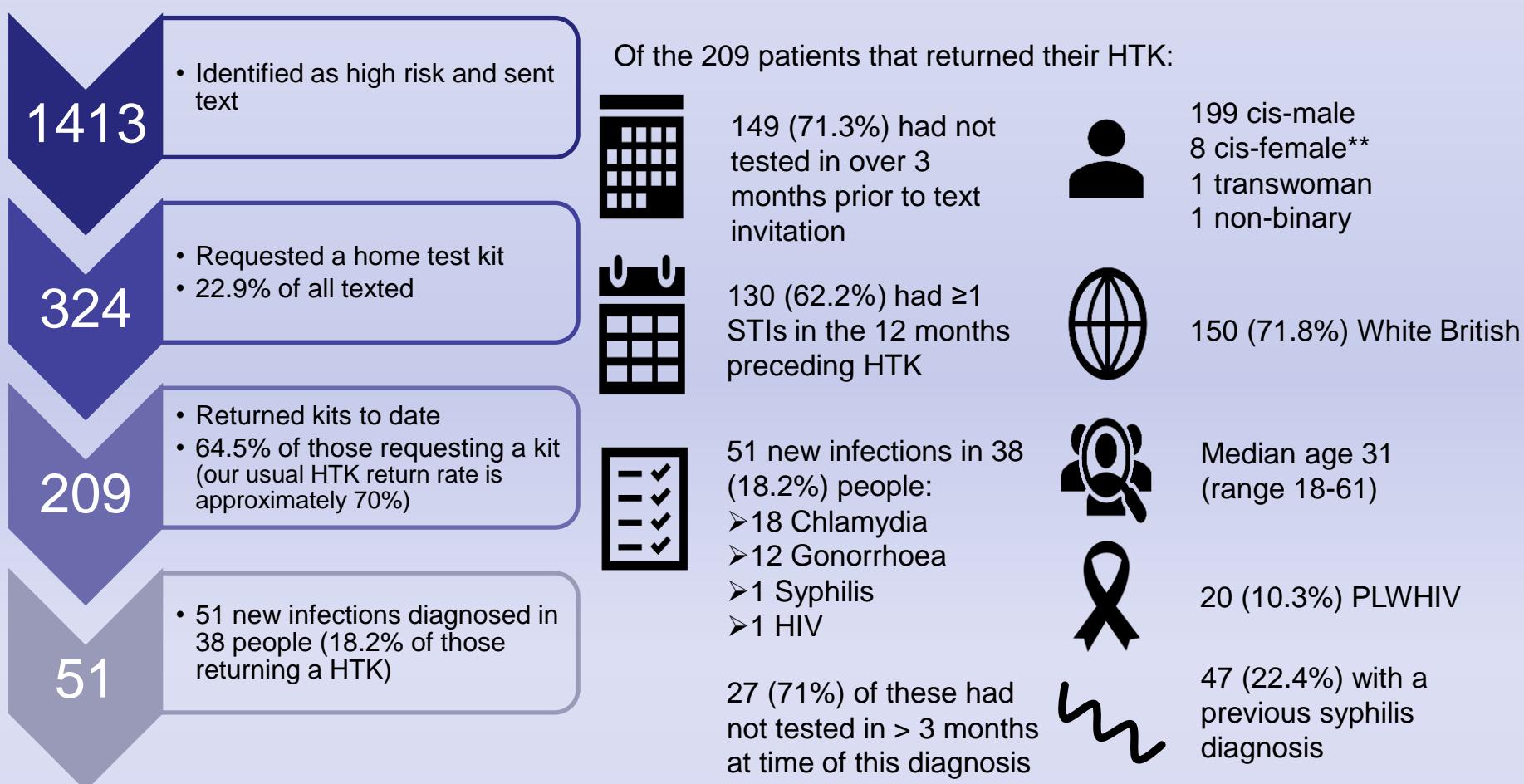
Methods

- We identified 1413 patients considered to be at particularly high risk of acquiring STIs:
 - those on our PrEP waiting list, or
 - MSM with a recently diagnosed rectal infection, or
 - those who self-identify as transgender with a recent rectal infection
- On 2nd June, before the lockdown measures were relaxed on 23rd June, they were sent a text inviting them to do a HTK. The link was accessible for two weeks
- Everyone* received testing for chlamydia and gonorrhoea and a dried blood spot for HIV, syphilis, HBsAg, HbAb and HCV antibodies

Testing for STIs as lockdown is relaxed may break the chain of infection. If you would like a kit visit <https://bit.ly/2MjRkmD> by June 12th

Copy of text sent

Results



Discussion

- COVID-19 has had a negative impact on STI and HIV testing, however, in such unusual times, this cheap targeted intervention was effective in detecting a significant number of infections
- This local intervention complemented national HIV testing campaigns² with the additional benefit of full STI screening and local linkage into care
- Given the high rate of those testing over 3 months since their last screen, as a service, we will review the utility of sending reminder texts to patients at higher risk
- We are in the process of approaching those who did not respond, or who didn't return the kit, to help us better understand what strategies and measures we can put in place to support them to test. The majority of the patients captured in this exercise were MSM. We also intend to re-evaluate our approaches towards other higher risk groups, such as people from countries with high HIV seroprevalence, sex workers, and people who inject drugs

References

1. British HIV Association, British Association and Sexual Health and HIV, and British Infection Society. UK National Guidelines for HIV Testing 2008 [Internet]. BHIVA; 2008. Accessible at <https://www.bhiva.org/file/RHNUJglseDaML/GlinesHIVTest08.pdf>
2. Break The Chain, Time To Test Campaign Accessible at <https://www.hivpreventionengland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Time-to-Test-Campaign-Information-Briefing.pdf>

*Except in 6 cis-female patients who did not have HBV and HCV testing
** Accessed testing link without invitation text in records