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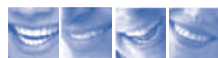
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Leo Tolstoy



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# Early HIV test effective

## Pilot project gets permanent nod in BC

**HIV**  
**NATHANIEL CHRISTOPHER**

Gay and bisexual men in British Columbia will soon have greater access to a more accurate form of HIV testing that can detect the virus as soon as a week after exposure.

A BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) study released Oct 9 found that pooled nucleic acid amplification testing (NAAT), also known as the early HIV test, greatly improves the diagnosis of early or acute HIV infection.

The pilot project, which will now be an ongoing program, examined HIV test results from men over the age of 18 at six clinics in Vancouver used by gay and bisexual men from April 2009 until March 2012. The research found that 25 men who would have received a negative result under standard HIV testing were diagnosed with acute HIV by pooled NAAT.

The researchers estimate that the new protocol may have prevented 25 to 75 new infections.

“This will increase the ability to diagnose early acute HIV infection, and this has the potential to affect the course of the epidemic,” says study



“The earlier you identify [HIV], the earlier guys can respond to their situation,” says Wayne Robert, executive director of the Health Initiative for Men. SHAUNA LEWIS

co-author Mark Gilbert, a physician epidemiologist in sexually transmitted infections at the BCCDC.

“The basic premise is that we know that acute HIV infection is in the first few months after infection. Viral load is very high, and that’s one of the factors that influences how infectious someone is. A high viral load increases


the chance of passing on HIV.”

Pooled NAAT is a form of testing developed in the United States that detects the presence of HIV in the blood before antibodies are detectable. Pooled NAAT tests can detect the virus seven to 15 days after an infection, compared to 20 to 30 days using standard tests.

“There have been some studies that suggest that up to half of infections are from someone with acute infection,” Gilbert says. “Most people in the acute phase of infection are unaware that they have HIV and are not taking measures to prevent HIV, and most people who get diagnosed take measures to prevent transmission. The sooner you know you have HIV, the sooner you take measures to prevent passing on HIV to other people. Giving people diagnoses at a very early stage really maximizes the prevention of HIV.”

Wayne Robert, executive director of the Health Initiative for Men, says pooled NAAT tests are an effective and cost-effective tool in HIV prevention.

“The earlier you identify, the earlier guys can respond to their situation,” he says. “In the case of acute HIV, they can take measures to prevent onward transmission and can make the decision of taking antiretroviral drugs earlier in the process of the disease, for example.”

 Read the full story on [dailyxtra.com](http://dailyxtra.com).

## HARASSMENT

### Calgary police target park sex

A Calgary man claims that four police officers threatened and intimidated him while he was cruising for sex in North Glenmore Park Sept 24.

“I walked into a wooded area off of the main path where I knew people went to connect for sex,” says @CalgaryQueer, who asked *Xtra* to publish his Twitter handle rather than his real name, for fear of reprisal. “As I came off the path, a guy was sitting at a picnic table that was there,” he says.

The man, who identified himself as a police officer, told @CalgaryQueer that city bylaws prohibit people venturing off the park’s main walking path. Violators can be charged for disturbing park vegetation, he said.

When pressed, the officer revealed that police had received complaints about “homosexual activity” in the park, @CalgaryQueer alleges.

The officer escorted @CalgaryQueer

out of the wooded area to the trail, where another officer was waiting. Together, they escorted him back to the parking lot, where two more officers awaited, in uniform.

One of the uniformed officers demanded to see his identification, @CalgaryQueer says. “Whether formal or informal, the Calgary police were making a list [of gay men cruising the area],” he alleges.

“I don’t know if they’re trying to change beliefs, extinguish beliefs or harass the gays,” he continues.

“Straight people have sex in the park,” he notes. “Are they being as aggressive in monitoring that, or about consuming alcohol in the park?”

Calgary police say they are cracking down equally on all public sex in the park, gay and straight.

“Sexual activity in public is against the law,” says Sergeant Jim Stinson of


the Calgary police.

“It’s about illegal sexual activities. It’s not about anyone’s sexual orientation,” he says. “I don’t think any reasonable person wants to see people having sex in public, no matter what their orientation is.”

Though Stinson says the Calgary Police Service isn’t mounting an official campaign to snuff out public sex, he admits bike patrols of the area have increased since police received complaints of “sexual activity” in the park.

“We don’t go looking for the issue,” he says, but “we are duty-bound to respond” when a complaint is received.

Asked why Calgary police dispatched both uniformed and plainclothes officers to the park, Stinson says it was not to intimidate park users. —Shauna Lewis

 Read the full story on [dailyxtra.com](http://dailyxtra.com).