

EMORY UNIVERSITY

# Self-Testing Research Studies

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**Testing Model Description:**

Emory University led the [Evaluation of Rapid HIV Self-testing Among MSM Project \(eSTAMP\)](#) a research project to evaluate the benefits of HIV self-testing strategies. Other research projects led by Emory, such as [Mobile Messaging for Men \(M3\)](#) also included [self-testing strategies for HIV and sexually transmitted infections](#) (STI) using self-collected samples. Recently, Emory launched [COVIDVu](#). This study will help to estimate the current number of COVID-19 infections and persons with antibody response nationally and across seven heavily impacted states. Participants will be mailed a sample collection which they will return for laboratory analysis.

**Recruitment:**

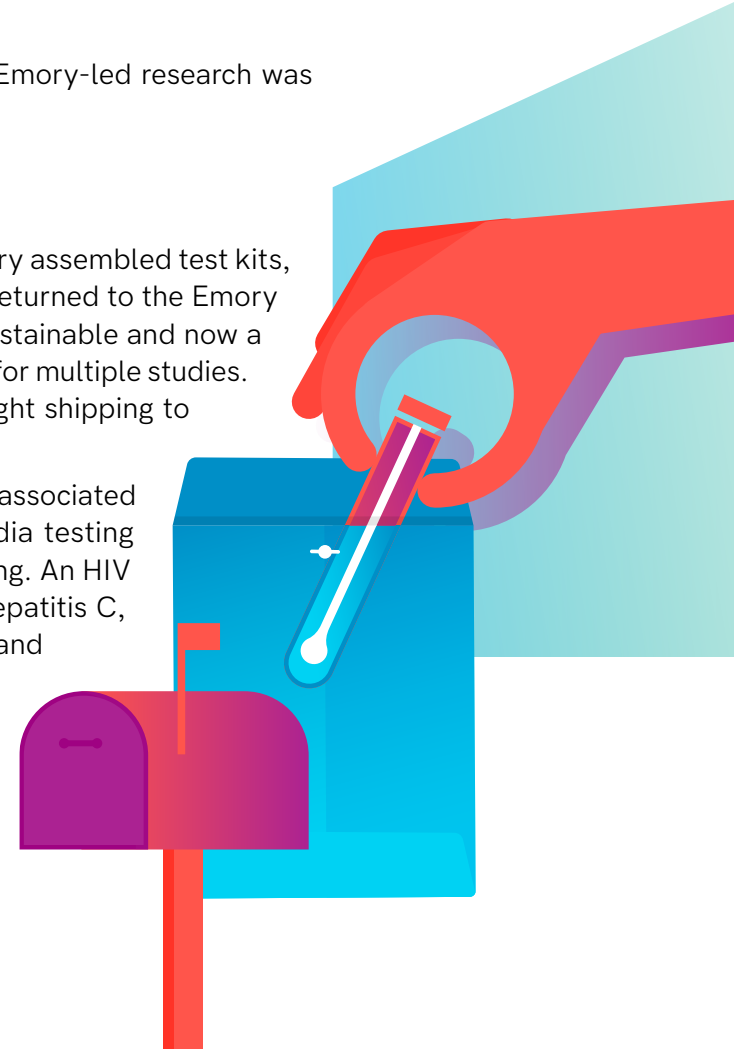
Recruitment for and access to HIV and STI testing provided in conjunction with Emory-led research was variable and dictated by study parameters.

**Program Management:**

Emory manages the infrastructure for self-testing for various studies. Initially Emory assembled test kits, facilitated distribution, and the Emory laboratory performed testing on samples returned to the Emory CfAR Clinical Virology Research Laboratory. Due to high demand, this was not sustainable and now a third-party laboratory assembles and ships test kits, consistent with specifications for multiple studies. Sample collection kits include return shipping supplies and instruction for overnight shipping to the laboratory performing tests.

Test kits match the objectives of individual studies. For example, the “STI CareKit” associated with the M3 study included self-collection supplies for gonorrhea and chlamydia testing (urine, throat swab, rectal swab) as well as a blood capillary tube for syphilis testing. An HIV PrEP testing kit included supplies for self-collection of blood samples for HIV, hepatitis C, syphilis, and creatinine, as well as urine, rectal, and throat swabs for gonorrhea and chlamydia testing.

Emory developed instructions and provided technical support to study subjects relative to sample collection, and sample packaging and return/shipping. Instructions and support were variable, and consistent with the needs of individual studies. Emory developed written materials, video, and provided individual support via email, text messaging, and, less frequently, via telephone.



### **Lessons Learned:**

Emory's experience in implementing self-testing strategies in conjunction with multiple research studies offers important lessons applicable to health departments considering implementing self-testing programs:

- Ensure that the laboratory performing testing has the capacity that you need, including
  - the capability of handling the volume of samples that will be submitted by your program;
  - successfully validated for all sample types that will be submitted;
  - the ability to conduct appropriate supplemental testing; and
  - the capacity to assemble and distribute the test kit required by your program.
- Have a clear process for delivering results to clients, and resources to support clients to interpret results. Some test results, including those that rely on an algorithm of tests for a final, diagnostic result may be a little confusing to some clients.
- Provide clear and detailed instructions regarding shipping. Some clients, particularly younger individuals may not have much experience or familiarity in sending packages.
- Develop multiple strategies for providing information and technical support for clients. Some individuals prefer, or may find it easier to understand information presented in a video format. Others may prefer detailed, written information. It is notable, that the written information regarding collection and submission of samples developed by Emory was lengthier and more detailed than informational material typically included by commercial or clinical laboratories/test manufacturers. This was due to feedback from study participants who indicated a preference for more detailed informational materials.
- Provide clients with a way to access help e.g. in collecting samples, performing tests, or returning samples via text messaging or email. Many individuals seem to prefer these means of communication over telephone calls.
- Anticipate that clients may find self-collection of blood samples a little more challenging than urine or extra-genital samples. It is helpful to provide detailed instructions or “tips” for better self-collection of blood samples. Tips for clients might include being well-hydrated or running hands under warm water before collecting samples. Programs might also consider including extra lancets or filter cards with sample collection kits.



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