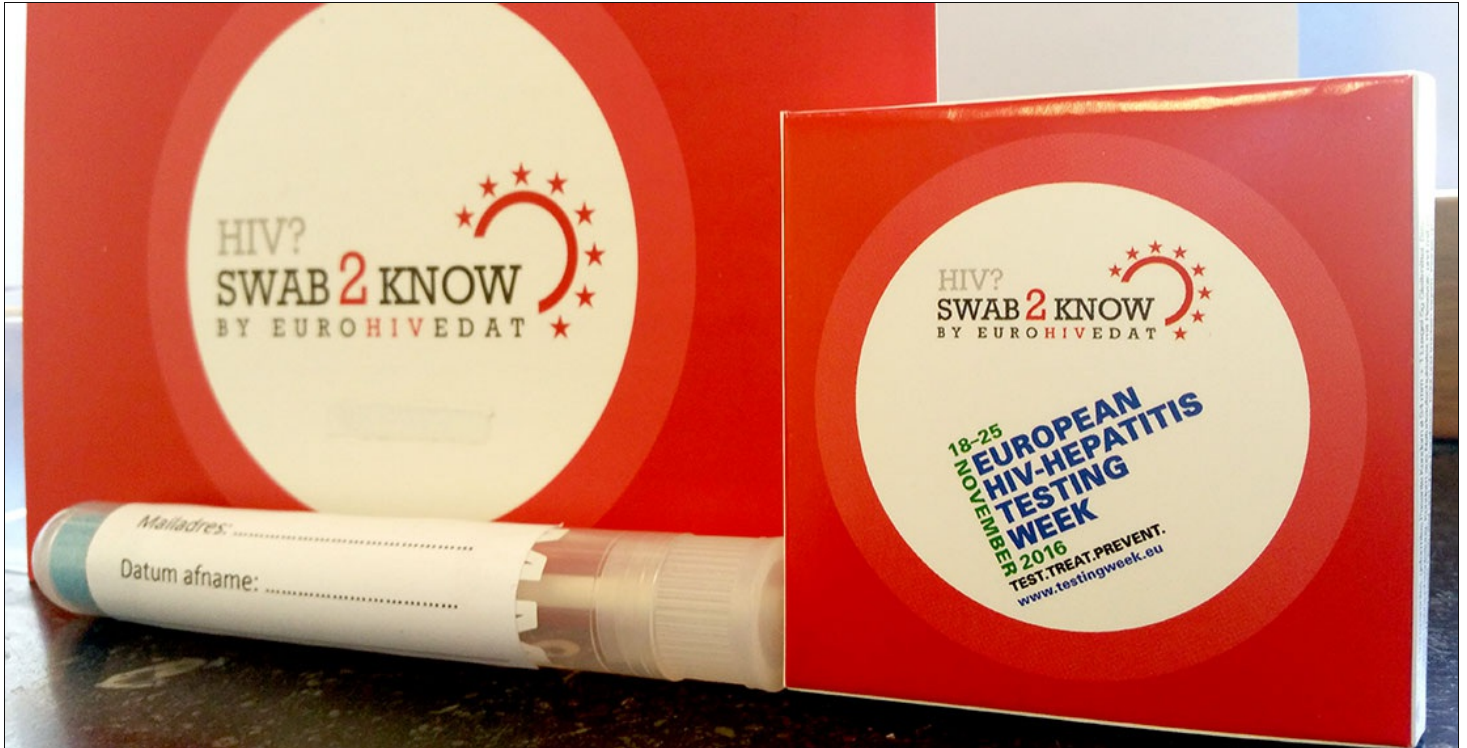


# ITM collects 400 saliva tests during HIV testing week

Number of new HIV diagnoses not decreasing in the main risk group

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Dit is de omschrijving

**At the close of the European HIV testing week the Antwerp Institute of Tropical Medicine clocked up nearly 400 saliva tests from people with multiple sexual partners, who run a higher risk of contracting HIV. ITM launched the Swab2Know prevention project on World Aids Day in 2012 (held annually on 1 December) and detected 35 additional HIV cases in the last three years.**

The number of new HIV diagnoses in Belgium fell again this year, except for the main risk group: men who have sex with men, including gay and bisexual men. After a sharp decline last year, [new figures from the Scientific Institute of Public Health \(ISP\)](#) show that the number of new infections is on the rise again among this group.

At the end of 2012 ITM initiated the Swab2Know project to facilitate access to HIV testing. By collecting a saliva sample on a small pad, antibodies against HIV can be detected. The saliva swab test was developed and validated by ITM's AIDS Reference Centre (ARC). The project is carried out jointly between the Institute, BoysProject and Sensoa, and has received financial support from the city of Antwerp.

The reactions from the gay community to Swab2Know were very positive from the start. Between 2013 and 2015, ITM analysed more than 3,000 saliva tests which led to 35 confirmed HIV diagnoses in addition to the 677 made by ITM's ARC in the same period. This year there have been eight new HIV diagnoses so far, through the Swab2Know project. During the HIV test week ITM researchers and nurses tested on location more often than usual. Risk groups can also order the test online.

"Last week we visited gay bars, saunas and festivals throughout Flanders together with colleagues from Sensoa. The saliva test lowers the threshold. You just wipe a small pad over your gums and you're done " says ITM researcher Lieselot Ooms.

"A positive saliva test result will need to be confirmed by a blood test. Someone who is positive will be referred to specialized HIV care. That's important because if you are on antiretrovirals, your chance of transmitting the virus to a sexual partner is much smaller. "

Swab2Know was a European first when it was launched in 2012, but its success did not go unnoticed. In 2015 the project was extended to Denmark, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia and Spain under the supervision of ITM and received [financing from the European Union](#).

Since Saturday 26 November, everyone can buy an HIV self-test with a CE label for â,- 29.90 in Belgian pharmacies. If you frequently change partners or have an HIV-positive partner, you will still be able to get tested anonymously and free of charge and have personal follow-up and supervision by ITM experts.