

## **Public health challenges for STI prevention and control after COVID-19 pandemic**

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COVID-19 pandemic has pointed out the necessity for improvement in healthcare in several countries across the globe. It is widely known that after global health and political crisis such as world wars I and II, there are marked increases of STIs in the general population due to different factors. This foreseen STI increase in a post-pandemic stage provides an opportunity to identify several challenges in prevention and control of STIs. First of all, strengthening of the healthcare systems and services which provide STI attention is mandatory, where different strategies such as decentralization or STI service provision integration with other diseases such as HIV or viral hepatitis, along with a thorough knowledge of the available resources are different strategies opened to debate. COVID-19 pandemic has also provided valuable experience and new scenarios of healthcare delivery are being considered, which are more patient-centered and with a special focus on the usage of new technologies. In this new setting, STI self-sampling, self-diagnosis and virtual assistance through apps, minimizing the contact with the traditional healthcare facilities, are being positioned as a key element for the future of STI prevention and control.

This approach to STI prevention has several advantages compared to traditional STI diagnostic methods, such as resource optimization and developing patient's autonomy regarding sexual health, contributing enormously to access outreach key populations. However, there are still several technical and regulatory barriers across the countries that hinder this progress, along with different issues concerning epidemiological data gathering and acceptability of these new diagnostic tools among general population. A combined effort within the different countries is mandatory to improve STI prevention and control after COVID-19 pandemic, where focusing on strengthening healthcare systems and improving STI diagnosis play a key role in the future of STI prevention and control.

### **Biography**

Javier Gomez Castella is a physician and Clinical Microbiology specialist, currently working in STI prevention and control area as a career civil servant in the National Plan against AIDS in the Public Health Directorate of the Ministry of Health of Spain. In the mainframe of the new strategic plan for prevention and control of HIV and other STI 2021 – 2030, the main lines of action on STI Javier is working on are the development of a new tool for addressing STI resources and provide information for further actions on STI prevention and innovation on early STI diagnosis, with special focus on self-sampling and community testing, as well as epidemiological research and surveillance on STI and gonococcal antimicrobial resistance.