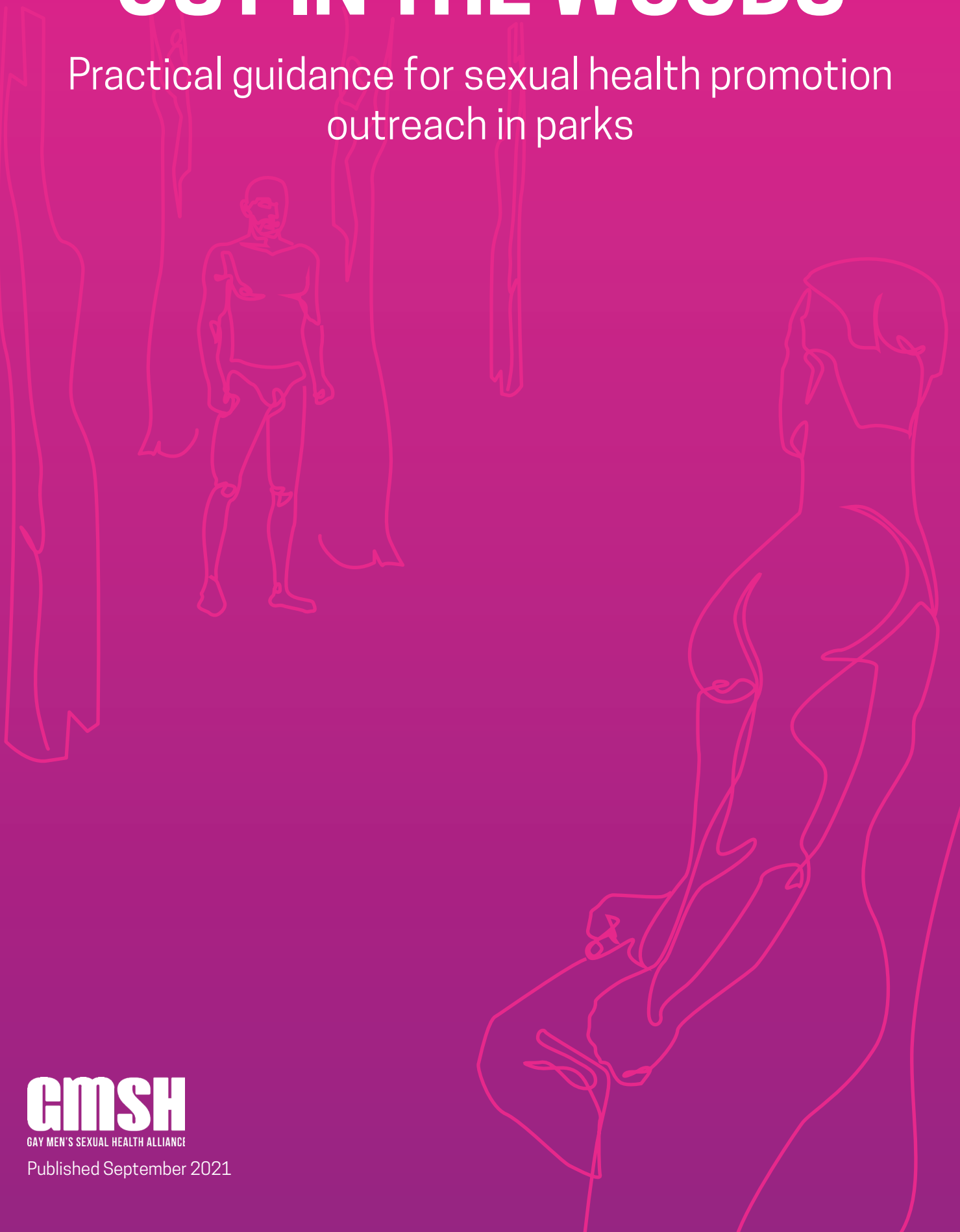


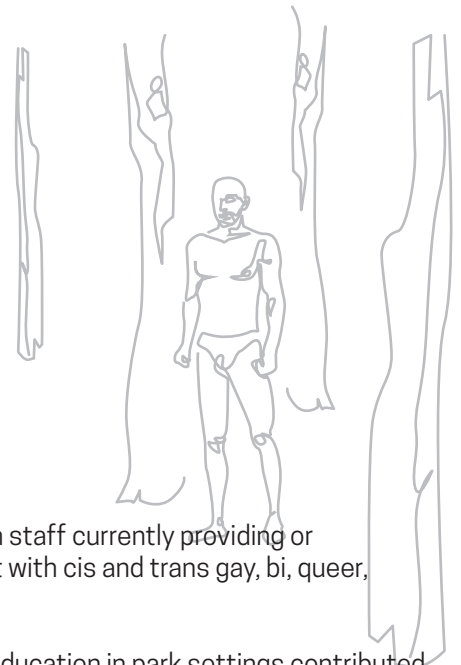
# OUT IN THE WOODS

Practical guidance for sexual health promotion  
outreach in parks



**GMSH**  
GAY MEN'S SEXUAL HEALTH ALLIANCE

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## ABOUT

Out in the Woods is a resource for front-line sexual health educators and outreach staff currently providing or considering Park Outreach. It provides tips and practical guidance for engagement with cis and trans gay, bi, queer, two-spirit, and other men who have sex with men (2GBTQ+).

A team of Alliance members who provide sexual health promotion resources and education in park settings contributed to this guide.

GMSH thanks the individuals who contributed their time, knowledge, thoughts, and expertise to this guide.

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## About Us

The Gay Men's Sexual Health Alliance (GMSH) champions the health of 2GBTQ+ men in Ontario. We lead the development of cutting-edge sexual health promotion resources and collaborate with HIV service organizations and other service providers in Ontario to ensure 2GBTQ+ men have the information, supports and services they need to have the sex they want.



[www.gmsH.ca](http://www.gmsH.ca) | [www.theseXyouwant.ca](http://www.theseXyouwant.ca) | [www.getprimed.ca](http://www.getprimed.ca)

## Background

This resource provides tips and tools for those who are considering or currently providing park outreach. The program examples included here are each unique but maintain a set of core principles and practices to maintain the safety of staff, volunteers, and park attendees.

## What's Park Outreach?

Park Outreach is a sexual health promotion activity to reach and engage with 2GBTQ+ men who cruise in parks. A combination of front-line staff, volunteers and peers may be providing park outreach.

Providers of park outreach must have up to date knowledge on topics including:

- HIV and STI transmission, prevention, treatment, and care
- HIV and STI testing approaches
- Prevention tools PEP & PrEP
- Safer sex strategies
- Harm reduction (in the context of sex and substance use)
- Local sexual health programs and clinics

We recommend checking out these essential resources:

- [The Sex You Want](#) (sexual health information and resources for 2GBQ+ men) & [Get Primed](#) (sexual health info and resources for trans and non-binary people)
- [Ontario PrEP & PrEPstart](#) (which provides three months of free PrEP for qualifying people!)
- [CATIE](#): Canada's source for information on HIV and Hepatitis C
- [HIV Resources Ontario](#): the first stop for ASO capacity building

**Just like cruising in a bathhouse, there is a culture of cruising in parks and public spaces.** It's a dialect that has been perfected in places like restrooms, city parks, and gym locker rooms. It relies on body language, eye contact, intuition, and knowing how to utilize public space.

[Watch this brief history on Gay Cruising](#)



# WHY PROVIDE IT?

Many 2GBTQ+ men continue to meet in public parks and spaces to cruise, have sex, and connect. Park outreach is about meeting 2GBTQ+ men where they are and an opportunity to engage, support, and deliver appropriate, non-judgmental, culturally sensitive care to individuals who may not seek services at agencies. Park outreach gives you the opportunity to:

- Promote local sexual health services and the work of your program/ organization
- Distribute safer sex supplies
- Distribute safer substance use supplies
- Refer individuals to testing, PrEP, treatment and more!

## COVID-19 considerations

The global COVID-19 pandemic dramatically changed the provision of HIV sector services in the province. Many 2GBTQ+ men's health programs moved to work in the virtual space. While this was happening, 2SGBTQ+ men were navigating new norms about sex, social distancing, and community care.

The GMSH produced a range of resources on COVID-19 and sex. [Check them out here.](#)

Park outreach in COVID-19 times

- When conducting park outreach, be aware of the City guidelines where you live, including details on infection prevention and control measures, parameters for physical distancing (keeping two metres or six feet away from people) and the cleaning and disinfection of commonly used equipment and surfaces.
- Wear a mask or face covering if it is difficult to maintain physical distance
- Become familiar with the current local Covid guidelines in your area by visiting your local public health unit website
- Ensure that your outreach team lead consults with your organizations' "health and safety" committee or reps
- The Ontario COVID-19 reopening plan can be [read here](#)

Some alliance members re-designed their outreach packs to include materials that promote COVID-19 prevention, testing, and vaccination. Some of the additional items were:

- Information on COVID-19 testing and vaccination sites
- Disposable masks
- Mini hand sanitizers
- A small pack of wet wipes

## Seasons and Cruising

There is no cruising season. It's year-round, even during the harsh winters, and it has continued throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some parks' cruising areas may appear to be seasonal, which means heavy traffic during the warmer months. However, it's wise to pay attention to those areas in colder months as well. Revisit public places that may seem old or that are no longer popular. Identify peak periods (times of year and the time of day) that areas are frequented.

## Keeping it safe



The health and safety of you and the people conducting park outreach are what's most important! There are unique hazards to be aware of and plan to address.

- After exiting heavily wooded/high grassy areas - check for ticks. Ticks are found in tall grass, fields and along hiking trails. Long sleeves and long pants tucked into your socks can help stop ticks from getting onto your skin. Wearing light colours will also help you spot any on you.
- Stay hydrated! Bring along water
- Stay nourished! Enjoy an energy bar while you're out
- Stay fierce. Stay ready.
- Wear proper footwear and pay attention to where you're walking- no beach slides in these woods
- Don't forget your cell phone
- Bug repellents that contain 15 to 30 percent DEET are best
- Watch out for giant hogweed, stinging nettle, poison oak, and poison ivy

Some of the most common safety supplies that are carried by park outreach staff and volunteers include:

- Bug spray (mosquito & tick), Sunscreen, reusable water bottle
- Hand sanitizer, mask, First AID Kit, Clorox wipes
- Nitrile gloves
- Tongs
- Industrial garbage bags, sharps - disposal box
- Clipboard, pens, tracking sheets, inventory sheets

### **Your park outreach activities should never contravene your organization's health & safety policies and procedures.**

It's always good to have a debrief with the people conducting park outreach after their shift. Some of the things you'll want to discuss include:

- The overall shift experience
- Specific incidents or things that stood out or occurred during the shift
- Locations of heavy or no traffic
- The interactions that resulted in engagement
- Areas where sharps and other evidence of play were found
- Health and safety concerns

## Recommended training

HIV Resources Ontario is a collection of provincial capacity-building programs in the HIV sector. To view and sign up for various training sessions.



Other commonly recommended training includes:

- health and safety guidelines re: COVID
- proper handling and disposal of sharps, condoms, and other materials
- de-escalation and nonviolent crisis intervention
- mental health first aid
- first aid & CPR
- motivational interviewing

## Pro-tip

- Practice role plays with your colleagues and volunteers to manage specific situations including
  - Involvement with police/by-law
  - Involvement with city park workers
  - Involvement with NIMBY – local residents who may not be supportive of your work
  - Encountering people engaged in sex
  - Being propositioned for sex

Cleaning up debris (general garbage, cigarette butts and packs, discarded coffee cups) from used kits which are good indicators of where play may have been occurring, – also, it strengthens the argument against (NIMBY Not in My Backyard) individuals or other opposition.

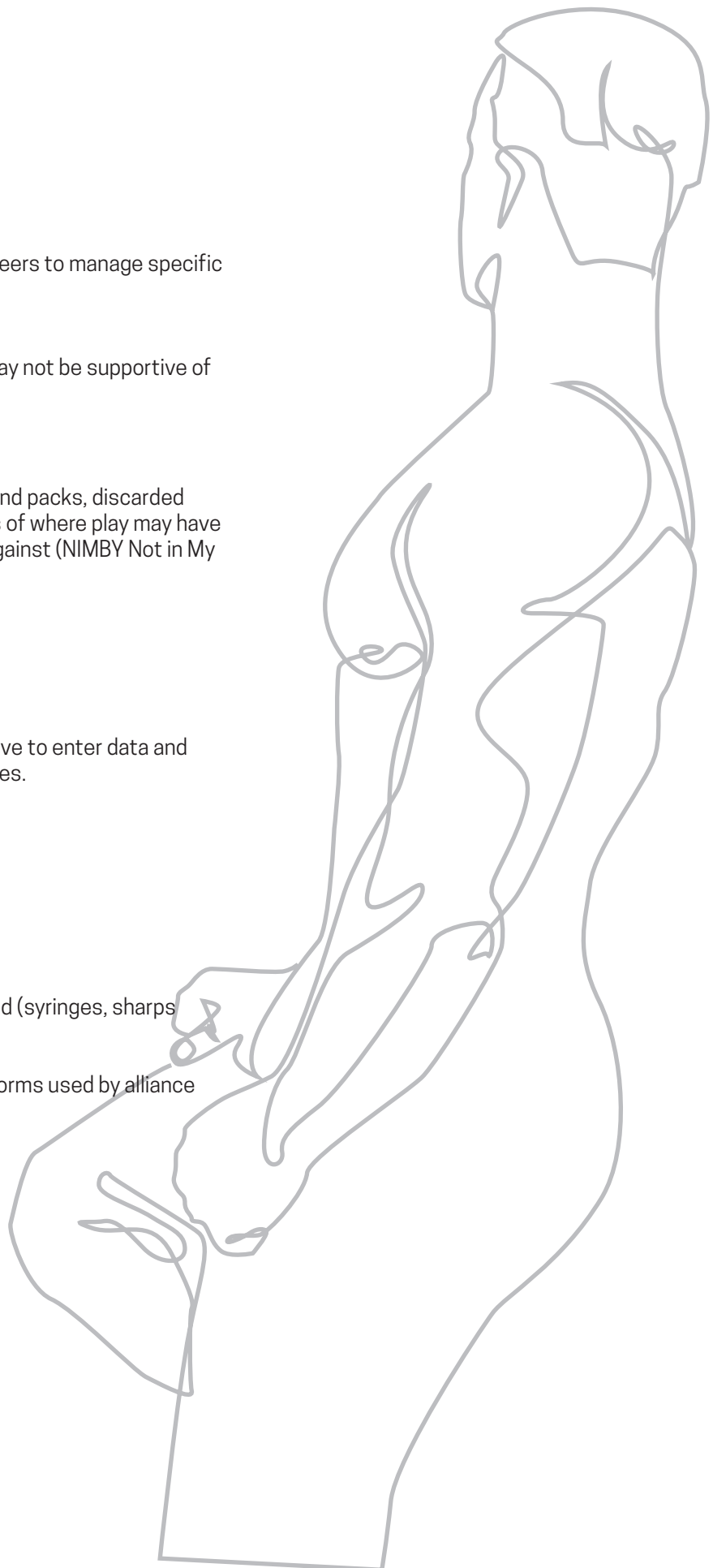
## Documentation and data

It's very likely (regardless of your funder) that you'll have to enter data and report back on the outcomes of your outreach activities.

Commonly collected and reported stats include:

- Total number of park packs distributed
  - # of lube
  - # of condoms
  - # of promo materials
- Total number of interactions with individuals
  - topics discussed
- Total number of harm reduction supplies distributed (syringes, sharps containers, waters, cookers and the like)






Jump to the appendix to see 2 examples of tracking forms used by alliance members.





## General tips & tricks

- When to schedule park outreach
  - Conduct outreach once every week or every couple of weeks to replace packs that you've distributed
  - Don't go at it alone
    - If you have volunteers- hit the trails together!
    - Park outreach should **never** be conducted alone and shouldn't require more than 3 hours of continuous time outside.
  - Keep your evenings open by completing park outreach during the daytime
  - Avoid providing outreach during periods of extreme weather like those hot July afternoons or frigid January mornings. You want to check the weather—parks are no place to be when a thunderstorm hits!
- Time Commitments
  - Park outreach requires time for things like recruiting and training volunteers, sourcing promotional materials and supplies, building the supply packs, visiting the parks and data entry and reporting
- Where to promote
  - Squirt.org is a popular sexual networking site. Many alliance members have outreach profiles and have found the local cruising listings helpful in identifying different parks and locations!
  - Grindr, Scruff, BBRT, Tindr and other geo-targeted apps remain popular with 2GBTQ+ men and alliance members providing outreach and education
- It's best to wear a t-shirt that clearly identifies you as an outreach staff/volunteer of your organization
- Always turn down sexual advances and respond by informing folks you are there providing a health service and aren't there to interrupt anyone's sexy times
  - Signals that someone may be looking to hook up
    - Eye contact
    - Hands in pocket
    - Playing with or touching their crotch
    - Tapping their foot
    - Parked with car door slightly ajar

## Current and planned park outreach programs in Ontario:

	<p>AIDS Committee of Cambridge, Kitchener, Waterloo and Area            (519) 570-3687            5-1770 King Street East, Kitchener, Ontario, N2G 2P1</p>
	<p>CAYR Community Connections            1-800-243-7717            17665 Leslie Street, Unit 12, Newmarket, ON L3Y 3E3</p>
	<p>HIV/AIDS Resources and Community Health (ARCH)            1-800-282-4505            77 Westmount Rd, Guelph, ON N1H 5J1</p>
	<p>Regional HIV/AIDS Connection            1-866-920-1601            #30-186 King Street, London, ON, N6A 1C7</p>
	<p>The AIDS Network            1-866-563-0563            140 King St. E. Suite 101 Hamilton, ON L8N 1B2</p>

Here are examples of park packs distributed by alliance members providing park outreach:

ORGANIZATION	IMAGE	CONTENTS
<p>CAYR COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS in York Region</p>		<p>2 condoms, 2 lube packets, 2 alcohol wipes, information insert on accessing safer sex and safer drug supplies and an information insert on sexual health alerts in the region</p>
<p>AIDS COMMITTEE OF CAMBRIDGE, KITCHENER, WATERLOO AND AREA</p>		<p>2 condoms, 2 lubricants, 2 alcohol wipes, The Sex You Want information card, and inserts that include program and agency information, including referrals to PrEP, HIV/STI testing, and the Motivational Interviewing program.</p>



# REFERENCES AND FURTHER READING

McCan, M. (2020). Yes, people still meet for sex in parks. No, it's not a problem: Lessons learned from park cruising, seven months into the pandemic. Retrieved from [Yes, people still meet for sex in parks. No, it's not a problem | by Marcus McCann | Medium](#)

Somlai, A. M., Kalichman, S.C. Bagnall, A. (2010). HIV risk behaviour among men who have sex with men in public sex environments: An ecological evaluation. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09540120120058030>

Huber, J.D., Kleinplatz, P, J. (2008). Sexual Orientation Identification of Men who Have Sex with Men in Public Settings in Canada. [https://doi.org/10.1300/1082y42n03\\_01](https://doi.org/10.1300/1082y42n03_01)

Youtube: [GAY CRUISING in the WOODS \(for beginners\) | Patrick Marano](#)

## APPENDIX

ACCKWA Park Outreach Tracking Tool  
Completed by staff and volunteers entering into a google form.

[INSERT pdf DOC]

**GMSH Park Outreach Tracking Tool**  
For park outreach

\*Required

1. Date of Park outreach \*

Example: 7 January 2019

2. What Park? \*

Mark only one oval.

Riverside  
 Homer Watson  
 St. Jacobs  
 Waterloo Park  
 Victoria Park

3. Staff/Volunteers on shift

4. Park Packs Distributed \*

5. Interactions? \*

Mark only one oval.

Yes  
 No

6. If above answered yes, how many?

7. Thoughts, Comments, Concerns?

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Google Forms

# CAYR Park Outreach Tracking Tool

Name of Park/Cruising site: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Person recording: \_\_\_\_\_

	Tally	Notes
# of packs distributed:		
# of interactions:		
Clean up		

Notes:

