

Navigating Sensitive Health Topics and Tasks in Human Factors Testing:

STRATEGIES FOR RESEARCH VALIDITY AND PARTICIPANT WELL-BEING

Bold Insight
Kaitlin Stinson

Genentech
Chris Valek

HIGH LEVEL SUMMARY

This poster presentation offers strategies for Human Factors (HF) researchers approaching sensitive research topics, emphasizing the balance between normalizing the process and acknowledging the stigmas that may accompany them.

INTRODUCTION

Sensitive health topics are topics that could hurt participants' reputation or cause negative repercussions if their data were released.

However, guidance is limited on working with user groups with:

- stigmatized identities,
- medical conditions, or
- other vulnerable populations.

Heightened importance should be taken when these characteristics are part of the objectives of the study.

Before conducting research, researchers must understand what additional considerations they should follow to ensure participant comfort, respect for the subject matter, and assuring data quality.

CONCLUSIONS

Conducting HF testing on sensitive health topics requires a nuanced approach to effectively and empathetically work with stigmatized or vulnerable populations.

Given the limited guidance available, researchers must take extra precautions to prioritize participant comfort, respect the sensitive subject matter, and ensure the integrity of collected data.

STRATEGIES

Strategy 1

Engage in **thorough background research relevant to the study focus.**



For example, if testing a product intended for individuals living with HIV, gaining a solid understanding of contemporary experiences and challenges faced by this community is essential.

This knowledge **enables researchers to approach sensitive topics with empathy and authenticity**, enhancing participant comfort and improving the overall quality of the data collected.

Strategy 2

Considerations when engaging and recruiting participants.



1. Were [you or your child] born with a penis?
 Yes
 No > Disqualify
2. The at home urine sample collection kit is intended for users assigned male at birth meaning they have a penis.
Are [you or your child] a good fit for this product?
 Yes
 No > Disqualify

Above is an example of insensitive vs. sensitive framing of a question.

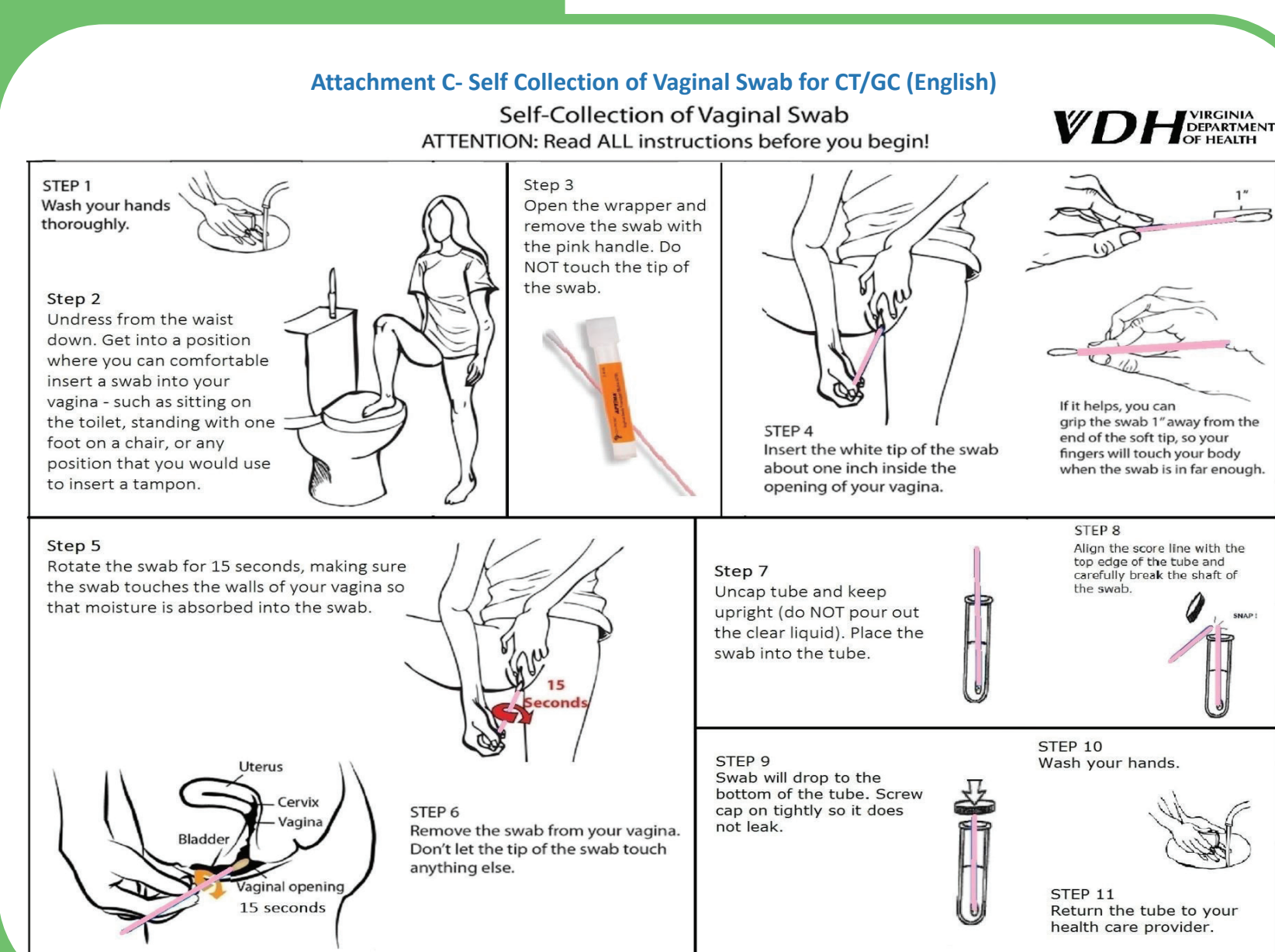
A carefully worded screener utilizing clear, yet gentle language can effectively inform participants about the session's nature while empowering those who may be uncomfortable to decline.

Investigate **what words / phrases that you should and should not be using** to avoid offending potential participants.

When it comes to screening eligibility for studies on sensitive health topics, the best practice to only ask for information necessary to determine eligibility is of increased importance to avoid unnecessary disclosure of private sensitive information.

Strategy 3

Treat the topic **seriously but know when to take a lighthearted approach** to set participants at ease.



For example, during the consent process in which participants read that they will simulate providing a urine sample during the test session, the moderator can take a more humorous approach to the consent process by acknowledging what may be perceived as a funny task to perform during testing.

Also, **be upfront and talk directly about how the test stimuli may be confronting and cause feelings of embarrassment or awkwardness.** This will set the tone for the test session; build rapport between the participant and the moderator, and help to reduce awkward moments during testing.

