

## Web-based HIV Behavioral Surveillance (WHBS)

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**Project Description:** The AIDS Office of the San Francisco Department of Public Health and CAPS developed and piloted an Internet-based, behavioral surveillance method of men who have sex with men (MSM), to compare data collected online to those collected in person through the national and local behavioral surveillance system (NBSS). We will compare the online sample of MSM to the more traditional, venue-based sample to assess any differences in behavioral risks between the two groups. Besides San Francisco, the project is implemented in five other US metropolitan areas: Baltimore, Boston, Dallas, Los Angeles, and New York. Data collected from approximately 3,000 men through this effort will be used to strengthen the national and local capacity to monitor the HIV epidemic and to develop, implement and evaluate effective HIV-prevention programs that both make use of Internet-based technologies and target populations that potentially may not be reached by the NBSS insofar as they don't frequent physical venues.

**Significance:** Many studies have documented that Internet chatrooms and personal ad websites are popular with MSM and may be related to their HIV risk-taking behavior. San Francisco was among the first cities to detect a link between Internet use and HIV-related risk behavior, tracing a cluster of new syphilis infections to a specific chatroom.

**Interesting Findings:** During the first 8 weeks of data collection, we recruited a sample of men through a combination of banner advertisements placed on popular websites and live recruiters in online venues who invited men to participate in the study. Potential participants were directed to a website where they could be screened and "consented" to take our Web-based survey. Seven hundred twenty men recruited via the banner advertisements completed the online survey, and 52 men recruited by a live person completed it. The race/ethnicity of the respondents was: 71% white, 14% Hispanic/Latino, 9% Asian/Pacific Islander, 2% multi-racial, 2% African American/Black, 1% other, and 1% American Indian/Alaska Native. Their ages were: 21% between 18-24, 19% between 25-29, 28% between 30-39, 23% between 40-49, and 9% 50 or older. Ninety-one percent of participants had more than a high school degree. Eighty-seven percent identified themselves as gay/homosexual, 11% as bisexual, 0.3% as heterosexual, and 1.4% as other. Slightly more than 10% indicated that they were HIV-positive. Additional analyses and comparisons to data collected in the National HIV Behavioral Surveillance system are ongoing.

**Project Recruitment Dates:** Spring/Summer 2007

**Project End Date:** Mid 2007