

CDC Goes Mobile to Help Eradicate HIV/AIDS

In its ongoing efforts to address the domestic and global HIV/AIDS crisis, CDC works with and provides leadership to community, state, national, and international partners in surveillance, research, prevention, and evaluation activities. Tracking HIV trends is challenging and depends on several factors, such as how often people are tested, when during the course of their infection they are tested, whether and how test results are reported to health departments, and how case reports are shared with CDC. Among the one million Americans currently living with HIV, CDC estimates that nearly one-fifth are unaware that they are infected with the virus.

To raise awareness about HIV/AIDS, December 1 was established as World Aids Day. Public health organizations around the world recognize the day and encourage people to get tested. In 2007, to observe World AIDS Day and to reach some of the 240 million mobile phone users within the United States, CDC collaborated with AIDS.gov, the Kaiser Family Foundation, and the CDC National Prevention Information Network to develop a mobile phone-based HIV test locator. The mobile KnowIt Campaign allowed users to send their zip codes via text message to the KnowIt contact number (566948) and, within seconds, receive a text message that identified an HIV testing site near them. Users could also access the online testing database at hivtest.org to find testing centers.

In addition to mobile messaging, CDC developed television and radio spots to promote the KnowIt Campaign. The agency also invited partners, grantees, and CDC website users to send free electronic health greeting cards and download graphic buttons that commemorated World AIDS Day and promoted HIV testing. CDC also provided online ads to health-related websites, including WebMD, a health information site that receives more than 17.1 million visitors a month.

In 2008, for the first time, CDC used social networks like MySpace, to promote HIV testing and World AIDS Day activities. CDC developed a series of graphical badges which were promoted on the agency's MySpace page. Users were invited to copy the badges and paste them into their own MySpace pages or other social network profiles. To further engage mobile audiences, a variation of the traditional public service announcement, the personal public service announcement (PPSA), was developed specifically to target young people. PPSAs are customized for use on personal media devices, like mobile phones and MP3 players.

CDC's 2008 National HIV Testing Day PPSA marked one of the agency's first health marketing interventions to use peer-generated content to promote healthy behaviors. After receiving training and approval from an expert panel, student teams from the University of Georgia, the University of South Carolina, Clark Atlanta University, Georgia State University, and Georgia Tech produced short videos that users could download to their mobile phones. Because social network sites, online games, video sharing sites, and mobile phones are fixtures in youth culture, CDC's use of new media and mobile technologies affords a great opportunity to reach young audiences.

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