

# Internet Partner Notification Efforts in Los Angeles County



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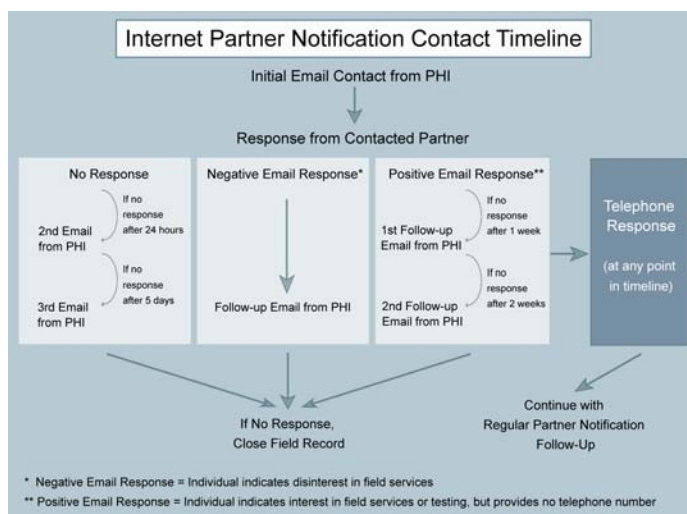
## OBJECTIVE

The objective of this analysis is to assess the initial efforts of the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health Sexually Transmitted Disease Program (STDP) at Internet Partner Notification (IPN). In 2008, there were a total of 1,075 cases of early syphilis among men who have sex with men (MSM) in Los Angeles County. These men reported a total of 7,933 sexual partners in the past year, of whom 1,411 (18%) were met on the internet. The STDP attempts partner notification for all syphilis cases. However, many internet sex partners have until recently been impossible to reach due to a lack of contact information other than a screen name for a specific website.

In July 2008, STDP created a detailed IPN protocol and then established an IPN profile on a website used by MSM to find sex partners. This particular website was named frequently by MSM syphilis cases when they were asked about venues where they met sex partners. The profile allowed public health investigators (PHIs) access to sex partners who had a screen name from that particular website. With the cooperation of the website management, IPN for syphilis began in November 2008.

## METHODS

Three PHIs extracted IPN data from November 1, 2008 through January 28, 2009, including the number of original syphilis patients, number of partners elicited, number of contact attempts made, response rates, and number of partners who were either tested for syphilis or refused testing. Additional data were extracted from the STDP case management database.



## Initial Partner Notification Email

Hi, my name is John Doe. I work with the Los Angeles County Public Health Department. I'm e-mailing you because someone you met was recently diagnosed with a laboratory-confirmed sexually transmitted disease (STD). You need immediate medical attention because this person identified you as a sex partner during the infectious period of this STD. For confidentiality reasons, I cannot tell you anything about the person you had sex with, including when it occurred.

You can call me at (213) XXX-XXXX, Monday through Friday, 8am to 5pm. If I am not available, you can leave your name and number on this CONFIDENTIAL line, and I will return your call as soon as possible.

If you would prefer, your doctor can also contact me and the relevant health information can be shared with him/her. Please ask your doctor to reference ID# XXXXXX when calling.

Thank you for your time.  
John Doe  
Public Health Investigator  
Los Angeles County Public Health  
(213) XXX-XXXX

## RESULTS

3 MSM syphilis cases provided screen names of 45 partners.

Of these 45 partners:

- 18 (40%) replied to email
- 9 (20%) refused syphilis testing
- 8 (18%) were tested for syphilis; all tested negative
- 3 (7%) were presumptively treated
- 2 (4%) were early syphilis cases in the past year

## CONCLUSIONS

The first three months of IPN at the STDP enabled contact of a significant number of partners, with nearly 18% of named partners getting tested for syphilis. Moreover, implementation of IPN was not overly burdensome. The website used by the STDP for IPN was highly cooperative and the protocol created can be used for multiple websites and in other jurisdictions.\*

IPN is a valuable tool for public health departments to complement traditional partner notification, as it allows contact of partners that might otherwise be impossible to locate. Toward this end, the STDP field services continues to elicit information about partners met on the internet from all syphilis cases. In June 2009, the STDP began IPN on a second website where MSM in Los Angeles County commonly seek sex partners.

\* The STDP IPN protocol is available for use in other jurisdictions. See contact below.