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## Comment from (David Harvey)

This is a Comment on the **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Notice: Network Epidemiology of Syphilis Transmission (NEST) 0920-18MY 2018-04329**

For related information, [Open Docket Folder](#)

### Comment

May 3, 2018

Re: Network Epidemiology of Syphilis Transmission (NEST) Study; Docket No (CDC-2018-0018)

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments regarding the Center for Disease Prevention's Division of STD Prevention (DSTDP) request for approval of a new three-year data collection entitled, Network Epidemiology of Syphilis Transmission (NEST). On behalf of the National Coalition of STD Directors (NCSD), these comments are submitted in support of NEST. NCSD is a nonprofit, nonpartisan membership organization that advances effective sexually transmitted disease (STD) prevention programs and services in every community across the country. Our vision is a nation without sexually transmitted diseases. Thank you for this opportunity to provide feedback on this proposal.

The speed at which STDs spread depends in part on the formation of sexual partnerships and the structure of sexual networks. The structural characteristics of a sexual network may not be captured through routine surveillance. The intention of NEST is to support the establishment of cohorts of men who have sex with men (MSM) at high risk for syphilis to help collectively address some of the knowledge gaps in the transmission dynamics and epidemiology of syphilis among MSM in the United States. This research will allow an understanding of the sexual networks and hopefully can point toward effective public health interventions to slow

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the spread of the disease.

The United States is currently experiencing a syphilis epidemic. The national rate of reported syphilis cases reached historic lows in 2000 and 2001 but has increased almost every year since then. Syphilis is associated with significant complications if left untreated and can facilitate the transmission and acquisition of HIV infection. The most recent data (from 2016) showed an increase of 18 percent in syphilis between 2015 and 2016 with 58 percent of the cases occurring among MSM. But, factors impacting syphilis transmission within the population, such as social and sexual network characteristics, sexual behaviors, and health care access and utilization, are poorly understood. Little information exists related to the barriers at-risk MSM face when attempting to access care, whether it is due to socioeconomic standing and/or a lack of comprehensive health insurance. Knowing this information is critical to understanding and addressing the needs of MSM. In order to attempt to close these knowledge gaps and develop solutions, data must be collected at both the individual and network-level among this population.

Used correctly, we hope that NEST will allow for the piloting of the use of survey instruments to collect this complex sexual network data and determine the feasibility and optimal approaches for serial collection of sexual network data among a population with dynamic networks and the data collection activities survey format. Sexual networks refer to groups of people who are considered to be linked by subsequent or concurrent sexual partners. While an individual may have only one sexual partner, if that partner is currently or was previously a part of a more risky sexual network, the risk of contracting STDs increases within the sexual network.

The data collection tools that NEST is designed to develop and pilot are essential to the STD fields understanding of sexual networks within the MSM community and therefore, to successful intervention in addressing syphilis among MSM overall.

Sincerely,

David C. Harvey  
Executive Director

## Attachments (1)

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**Network Epidemiology of Syphilis  
Transmission (NEST) Study (CDC-  
2018-0018)**

**View Attachment:** 

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