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San Francisco Estimates an Overall Ten Percent Drop in HIV Infection Rates and a

Substantial Twenty Percent Drop in HIV Infection Rates Among Gay and Bisexual Men

STOP AIDS Project Calls New Estimates An Encouraging Sign for the Future

San Francisco – The San Francisco Department of Public Health has predicted an overall 10% drop in HIV infection rates for 2006, compared to 2001. In addition, the City is reporting a substantial 20% reduction in HIV infection rates among gay and bisexual men. San Francisco's downward trend in HIV infection rates is unique among major cities and provide evidence that HIV prevention efforts are working. At the beginning of the AIDS epidemic 1 in 5 gay and bisexual men became infected with HIV every year, this latest data indicates that less than 2 out of 100 will become infected in 2006. Data collected by the STOP AIDS Project contributed to the SF DPH's estimates.

“The message overall is that HIV prevention is working,” said Jason Riggs, Deputy Director of the STOP AIDS Project. “This new information is very encouraging. Our hope is that the downward trend doesn't reverse again but rather gains momentum in the years to come.”

While it may take years to know why HIV infections are going down, City officials and the STOP AIDS Project are attributing it to several factors.

“New infection rates are going down because of a unique combination of forces,” added Riggs. “Gay and bisexual men are increasingly taking healthy measures to protect themselves and others from HIV, new treatments are helping to keep HIV positive people less infectious, and San Francisco has a higher percentage of people who know their HIV status.”

The new estimates predict that 976 people will be infected with HIV in 2006 compared to 1,084 in 2001. Eighty-seven percent of new HIV infections will occur among gay and bisexual men. In addition, the City estimates that 18,735 San Franciscans are living with HIV up from 17,817 in 2001, in part due to treatments that help those with HIV live longer. Among gay and bisexual men, it is estimated that 14,205 are living with HIV, compared to 12,786 in 2001. The City is also estimating a 25% increase in the number of gay and bisexual men living in San Francisco from 46,800 in 2001 to 58,343 in 2006.

Several efforts may be contributing to the projected drop in new infections among gay and bisexual men:

- Gay and bisexual men are increasingly finding successful strategies to protect themselves and others from HIV. For example, according to data collected by STOP AIDS, more HIV positive men are making a personal decision to only have sex with other HIV positive men (known as sero-sorting). Since 2001, the percentage of HIV-positive men reporting having unprotected sex with HIV-negative men, or men whose status is unknown, has fallen to 21 percent from 31 percent. The percentage of HIV-negative men having unprotected sex with positive men, or men of unknown status, has fallen to 4 percent from 20 percent.
- Men in San Francisco are more likely to know their HIV status than men in other cities and are therefore more likely to protect HIV negative partners. According to a study of five cities by the CDC, 23% of men in San Francisco who are HIV positive don't know they have HIV. This is compared to Baltimore where 62% of HIV positive men didn't know they were positive.
- New treatments for HIV may be keeping HIV positive people less infectious by reducing viral load. San Francisco has a higher percentage of HIV positive people in HAART compared with other cities.
- Decreases in STD transmission such as syphilis, which make it easier for HIV to enter the body. Syphilis cases declined 27% from 346 cases in the first half of 2004 to 251 cases in the first half of 2005.
- STOP AIDS data indicates that crystal meth use among gay and bisexual men is declining from 18% in the second half of 2003 to 10% in the first half of 2005. Studies indicate that crystal use among gay and bisexual men and HIV transmission are highly correlated. Gay and bisexual men who use crystal are 3 to 4 times more likely to get HIV and represent 30% of new HIV infections in San Francisco.

The City is also expected to reduce estimates for HIV incidence rates among gay and bisexual men from 2.2 percent in 2001 to 1.75 in 2006. The 2006 report estimates that less than 1 in 4 gay and bisexual men has HIV compared to the 2001 report estimating that nearly 1 in 3 gay and bisexual men in San Francisco had HIV.

To estimate new HIV infection rates epidemiologists analyze data from several sources including HIV testing sites, private doctors, and surveys like those collected by the STOP AIDS Project. Thousands of surveys collected every year by the STOP AIDS Project with gay and bisexual men enable the organization, the City, and other organizations to plan HIV prevention efforts.

The STOP AIDS Project works to prevent the spread of HIV among gay, bisexual and transgender men in San Francisco.