

National HIV Behavioral Surveillance (NHBS) 2020 and 2021: Challenges and Successes

Overview

The National HIV Behavioral Surveillance Survey (NHBS) is designed to gather information from populations overburdened by HIV infection. These populations include heterosexually active persons at increased risk (HET), men who have sex with men (MSM), and persons who inject drugs (PWID). NHBS is administered in rotating cycles focusing on target populations. The information gathered from the survey is used to inform prevention initiatives, identify community needs, and describe trends in these populations.



2020 and 2021 Challenges

2020 was meant to be a MSM cycle using venue-based sampling (the standard method of data collection for this population), but the COVID-19 pandemic posed significant challenges to NHBS data collection efforts. With stay-at-home orders in place and all MSM venues shut down, NHBS could not complete regular data collection in any capacity. Efforts were made to pivot to a smaller qualitative evaluation, but finding participants in a new virtual environment was difficult.

By 2021, it was decided to repeat the MSM cycle, but most MSM venues remained closed, and recruitment methods continued to be difficult. Interviewing, testing and incentive payments had to remain virtual, and some individuals had many technical barriers to accessing the interview and maintaining a virtual connection.

National HIV Behavioral Surveillance (NHBS) 2020 and 2021: Challenges and Successes

2020 and 2021 Successes

Michigan NHBS was able to pivot from traditional data collection activities in 2020 to implement a qualitative evaluation (QE) to better understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sexual behaviors, prevention activities, and HIV care of MSM. This was the first QE in NHBS history and provided context and insight for future NHBS activities.

In 2021, Michigan used respondent-driven sampling (in lieu of venue-based sampling) and virtual interviewing for the MSM cycle for the first time. Additionally, in the new virtual environment, the CDC was able to conduct a virtual site visit and sit in on virtual NHBS interviews -- a testament to the program's adaptability.

Michigan also utilized Orasure at-home HIV test kits for the first time in 2021 as part of the NHBS testing process, which has quickly become a common testing option in the community post-COVID.

Upcoming Cycles

NHBS is conducting an MSM cycle in person for the first time post-pandemic. Venues used in previous cycles have closed, making finding new venues a priority. Patronage at MSM venues is also down significantly post-pandemic, making recruitment efforts harder. However, new social organizations and options for virtual recruitment may help change the landscape and diversify participation efforts.

The current MSM cycle will be followed by the PWID cycle in 2024 and the HET cycle in 2025, which may have further unforeseen challenges associated with post-pandemic changes.



Bureau of HIV
and STI Programs

For additional HIV/STI data reports visit:
<https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/keep-mi-healthy/chronicdiseases/hivsti/data-and-statistics>

MDHHS Bureau of HIV and STI
Programs
michigan.gov/hivsti