

Technical notes on race and ethnicity classification in New York City HIV surveillance data in the October 2009 HIV Epidemiology and Field Services Program (HEFSP) Semiannual Report and subsequent HEFSP publications

Introduction. This document provides technical notes on classification and presentation of race and ethnicity by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's HIV Epidemiology and Field Services Program. New York City (NYC), along with more than 50 other public health reporting jurisdictions in the United States, reports the race and ethnicity of HIV cases to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as part of the nationally notifiable disease surveillance system. While data on race and ethnicity data has been collected on all reported HIV-infected cases since AIDS surveillance began in NYC in 1981, classification and presentation of race and ethnicity has changed over time as national standards evolved and federal guidelines have been revised (1-3).

Collection of race and ethnicity information. Since the establishment of public health surveillance for AIDS, and later HIV, in NYC, HEFSP has collected race and ethnicity data that meet federal standards for classification. Most recently, federal guidelines have required that at least five race categories and one ethnicity category be collected (3). The five race categories are: American Indian or Alaska Native; Asian; Black or African American; Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander; and White; the ethnicity category is "Hispanic or Latino." Also consistent with federal guidelines, HEFSP's data systems allow for the retention of all race information when multiple races are reported. Ethnicity data are collected such that cases fall into the ethnicity categories of "Hispanic or Latino," "Not Hispanic or Latino," or "Unknown." HEFSP collects and maintains ethnicity information separately from race information, so persons of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity have a separate race classification.

Presentation of race and ethnicity information in HEFSP publications prior to the October 2009 HEFSP Semiannual Report.

Race and ethnicity information collected as part of routine surveillance is used as the basis for the data presented in the combined race/ethnicity variable presented in HEFSP surveillance reports, annual surveillance tables, and standard slide sets. In past HEFSP publications, the combined race/ethnicity variable of NYC HIV surveillance data included the following six categories:

- Black
- Hispanic
- White
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Native American
- Other/unknown

Cases with the ethnicity "Hispanic or Latino" were grouped in the race/ethnicity category "Hispanic," regardless of their race classification. Cases represented in the other five race/ethnicity categories had an ethnicity that was either "Not Hispanic or Latino" or "unknown." Cases included in the categories "Black," "White," and "Native American," were drawn from the corresponding race categories "Black or African American," "White," and "American Indian or Alaska Native," respectively. Cases represented in the race/ethnicity category "Other/unknown" included both those cases with two or more races and those whose race information was missing from source documents or was otherwise unknown. Cases represented in the "Asian/Pacific Islander" category were drawn from the race categories "Asian" and "Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander."

Presentation of race and ethnicity information in the October 2009 HEFSP Semiannual Report and subsequent HEFSP publications.

Beginning with the October 2009 Semiannual Report, HEFSP will discontinue its use of the race/ethnicity category "Other/unknown." A new race/ethnicity category named "Multiracial" will be used to represent cases with two or more races. Cases in which race information was missing

from source documents or is otherwise unknown will be included in the race/ethnicity category “Unknown.” Cases whose race is “Asian” or “Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander” will continue to be combined and reported within the single race/ethnicity category “Asian/Pacific Islander.” The combined race/ethnicity variable of NYC HIV surveillance data now includes the following seven categories:

- Black
- Hispanic
- White
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Native American
- Multiracial
- Unknown

The NYC HIV surveillance registry is a dynamic dataset, and case information changes over time as new information is received. Information obtained from a medical record when a case is first reported may change when new information is received, such as reports of HIV-related laboratory tests or a death certificate. For these reasons, race information on a small proportion of cases can change over time as new and more accurate information is received. HEFSP strives to report race and ethnicity as accurately as possible, with particular attention to race categories that are infrequently reported.

1. US Census Bureau. Racial and Ethnic Classifications Used in Census 2000 and Beyond. Retrieved December 15, 2009, from <http://www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/race/racefactcb.html>.

2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. HIV/AIDS Surveillance Report, 2007. Vol. 19. Atlanta: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2009. Technical Notes. Retrieved December 15, 2009, from <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/topics/surveillance/resources/reports/2007report/technicalnotes.htm>.

3. Office of Management and Budget. Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity. Federal Register 1997; 62: 58781–58790. Retrieved December 22, 2009 from <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/rewrite/fedreg/ombdir15.html>.