



## **Bathroom Debates in NYC; Is Chicago Next?**

By [Windy City Media Group](#)

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Chicago, IL - While New York City's health department debates whether or not it will regulate the city's bathhouses and sex clubs, local health officials do not think Chicago will return to the great bathhouse debates of the past.

"We've been in this epidemic for 25 years now, and the epidemic has clearly evolved over time, and I think our responses have evolved over time, also," said Chris Brown, assistant commissioner of the STD/HIV/AIDS division of the Chicago Department of Public Health ( CDPH ) . "We've learned a lot from history, and in Chicago, we're putting a lot of energy into working with our partners to do what we can to reduce the transmission of HIV and the transmission of sexually transmitted diseases that are associated with the bathhouses."

"I don't see the debates repeating themselves," Brown continued. "I think we've evolved."

Gay City News reported that a leaked memo from New York City's health department indicates health officials are reconsidering the city's policies regarding bathhouses and sex clubs. More recent reports indicate that the area's health officials, due to increasing new HIV infections and syphilis rates, are considering shutting down such venues.

"We've been funding a lot of prevention efforts in the LGBT community for a long time now," Brown said. A lot of work has been done in the past year and a half, Brown said, specifically dealing with transmission at venues such as bathhouses.

The local health department is actively involved in building partnerships with area venues in prevention efforts. For example, CDPH is a partner of the Chicago Task Force on LGBT Substance Use and Abuse ( formerly the Chicago Crystal Meth Task Force ) . In Chicago, venues such as Steamworks have positive relationships with agencies such as Centers for Disease Control, CDPH and community organizations like Howard Brown Health Center and Test Positive Aware Network.

According to Nanette Benbow, director of CDPH's Office of HIV/AIDS Surveillance, it is too early to look at new infection rates among men who have sex with men ( MSM ) during 2007 because only about half of the reporting has been finished. However, since HIV reporting began in 1999, HIV infections among MSM peaked at 994 in 2002. Since then, HIV infections among MSM have declined, with 770 reported in 2005 and 766 in 2006.

*Written by Amy Wooten*

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