

# Breaking the silence online

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A website that allows sex partners to inform each other about their sexual health has been launched in Los Angeles.

With the growing significance of the internet amongst people seeking sexual encounters, L.A. County health officials believe the site could prove valuable in helping to prevent the spread of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections. The site enables partners to email people anonymously to alert them to the risk of any infection.

The system will be welcomed by people who find it awkward to break such news in person or by telephone. Also, whether or not partners

choose to get tested, behavioral studies reveal that when people become aware that they are infected with HIV, they tend to moderate any risky behavior and consider using condoms.

Located at [www.inSPOTLA.org](http://www.inSPOTLA.org), the site allows users to send postcards with personal or standard messages. By allowing people to hide behind the site, its goal is to give them the confidence to talk about things they wouldn't discuss face to face. Such frank conversations would encourage future sex partners to consider being tested for any sexually transmitted diseases. It is hoped that this will lead to more people being tested and treated as well as modifying their sexual behavior.

The site is open to the general public, however, it is targeting people who seek casual sex over the internet. The L.A. County site is part of a national campaign advocating safer sex. Seattle, Philadelphia and Indiana will soon launch similar sites.

Although some people have expressed concerns that the site could be misused by casual users, its creators claim that only 1% of e-mails posted have been identified as pranks. Another potential shortcoming is that many users will not have exchanged email addresses with partners, due to the casual circumstances in which they meet. Nevertheless, the site is a commendable initiative in the fight against the spread of sexually transmitted infections.

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