Reviewer's report

Title: Herpes simplex virus type 2 seropositivity and relationship status among U.S. adults age 20 to 49: a population-based analysis

Version: 1 Date: 28 June 2010

Reviewer: Amalia Magaret

Reviewer's report:

Summary:
This manuscript is nicely written and addresses an important public health issue. The methods are appropriate and the results are described clearly. A few issues deserve some qualification as described below.

Discretionary revisions:
1. Discussion page 14: Regarding the last paragraph, it is also possible that the discrepancy between self-report and seroprevalence is independent of seroprevalence because the great majority of those infected may not recognize any potential symptoms as herpetic, though they can be instructed to do so. See Wald 2004 Herpes “Herpes Simplex Virus Type 2 and Transmission: Risk Factors and Viral Shedding” and Wald 2000 NEJM “Reactivation of genital herpes simples virus type 2 infection in asymptomatic seropositive persons”. Self-reported infection may simply indicate access to health care.

2. Discussion page 15: Regarding the paragraph on taking herpes infection seriously, recent research has shown in several groups that the psychological impact of a new herpes diagnosis is mild and short-lived. See Richards 2007 STI “HSV-2 serologic testing in an HMO population” and (somewhat less relevant) Meyer 2005 “The psychosocial impact of serological herpes simplex type 2 testing in an urban HIV clinic”. The statement about “great psychological distress” should be qualified accordingly. Testing is an important aspect of prevention.

3. Figure 1 would be clearer with four colors instead of 2. As it is, the comparison between seroprevalence and self-report is not easily done visually.

Minor non-essential comments:
1. Move last sentence before the section “measures” to the beginning of the results section.

2. In the section “measures” a result is present: “In the course of our analysis, and consistent with published literature, we found differences in HSV-2 seropositivity and in the unadjusted rate of increase of prevalence with age between Black respondents and either Hispanic or White respondents.” This should be moved to “results”.

3. Page 10, I think “For models within both age strata” means “For models within
either age strata”. If this is correct, please modify as it would be clearer that a combined model was not performed.

4. Discussion page 12: This sentence is particularly clear and helpful for interpretation of the findings: “We caution against the assumption of lower risk for a partner who is married or cohabitating … ”

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: Yes, and I have assessed the statistics in my report.

Declaration of competing interests:

I have no competing interests.