Reviewer's report

**Title:** Characteristics of HIV Seroprevalence of Visitors to Public Health Centers Under the National HIV Surveillance System in Korea: Cross Sectional study

**Version:** 1  **Date:** 30 August 2008

**Reviewer:** Onno de Zwart

**Reviewer's report:**

The study is interesting as it reports on the background of the HIV-epidemic in Korea. The design of the study is clear and the way the data have been analysed seems suitable. However, the manuscript also raises some questions.

Major compulsory revisions:

1. The background information available on the people who took an HIV-test is limited. No information is available on sexual behavior (e.g. number of partners, gender of partners, use of condoms) or other risk factors like injecting drug use. As the highest HIV prevalence was found in the group ‘Suspected group of HIV infection HIV ISG) and then especially among males (age groups 30 – 49) one can hypothesize that – a part of – this group are men having sex with men or may be injecting drug user. In other countries these groups form a major part of the HIV epidemic. This possible explanation is not discussed in the manuscript and this limits the value of it.

2. How the process of categorization in the different groups took place is not clear. Was this done by the health workers in the PHC’s or by the national surveillance system. This process should be clarified as well as possible limitations of this process.

3. Concerning the repeated testers it is not clear whether the higher percentage in the group STI risk is related to the frequency of tests which are required as part of the mandatory testing system.

4. As only a limited percentage of HIV tests are conducted in PHC it would be helpful to give more information on the part other test locations play. Now this is very limited. Can people also go for voluntary testing to these locations?

5. On page 8, line 14 it is stated that foreigners may introduce HIV in Korea as HIV prevalence is higher in this group. Also information is included about possible sexual risks, however, the study contains no information about their sexual behavior so these passages are too speculative and not based on the data.

6. In the conclusion the authors state that voluntary testing should be promoted as this is more effective than mandatory testing. I wonder why the authors do not discuss the possibility that mandatory testing should be limited or stopped (in line with international recommendations) as their study also shows that it has no additional value.
Minor revisions

1. In the background the policy concerning mandatory and voluntary testing is introduced. However, in the discussion new information is given on changes in testing policies in 1988. This information should be integrated in the background. It would be helpful to clarify what groups currently have to undergo mandatory testing.

2. On page 5 (lines 8 – 13) it is not clear what is meant by took free HIV testing personal physical examinations.

3. On page 7, line 9 table 4 should be mentioned.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Needs some language corrections before being published

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests