

INFORMATION AND RESOURCES TAKEN FROM THE AIDS.GOV BLOG

VIRTUAL WORLDS

What are virtual worlds?

A virtual world is a computer-based, simulated reality or fantasy environment where people can socialize, connect, and create in an infinite number of ways. Participants can develop digital representations of themselves, known as avatars. In a virtual world, you can be whomever (or whatever) you want to be.

Why would I use a virtual world?

People use virtual worlds to connect people with similar interests. Typically, people use virtual worlds for entertainment, but a growing number of educational institutions and businesses are using them as training and teaching venues.

Who is visiting virtual worlds?

- Participation in virtual worlds is increasing at an average of 15% per month, and
- By 2011, an estimated 80% of Internet users will take part in virtual worlds.¹

How are people using virtual worlds to respond to HIV?

- To provide HIV/AIDS information.
- To facilitate support groups for people infected and/or affected by HIV/AIDS.
- To honor people who have died from AIDS-related illnesses.
- To give people an environment to model safe health behaviors which may lead to changes in real-life behaviors.

What technology do I need to visit a virtual world?

You need Internet access to visit a virtual world. Some virtual worlds require you to download software.

Where can I learn more about virtual worlds?

Examples of virtual worlds include:

- Club Penguin: www.clubpenguin.com 
- Habbo: www.habbo.com 
- Second Life: www.secondlife.com 
- Whyville: www.whyville.net 

Examples of virtual communities within Second Life include:

- National Library of Medicine's HIV/AIDS Information Center on HealthInfo Island
- AIDS Memorial Garden
- HIV Support Network Headquarters
- Planet Positive Group

¹ Gartner, "Gartner Says 80 Percent of Active Internet Users Will Have a 'Second Life' in the Virtual World by the End of 2011", Available at: <http://www.gartner.com/it/page.jsp?id=503861>. Accessed on 8/29/08.