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## The NATION’S HEALTH

The official newspaper of the American Public Health Association

November 2007

### Computers increasingly used to track, predict, prevent disease Infectious disease fight being waged in bits, bytes

**F**OR MUCH of the planet, computers are as ubiquitous to modern life as automobiles and cell phones. Whether it’s a sleek new laptop or the small chip inside a cell phone, the power of computers has truly changed the world, making it bigger and smaller at the same time. Still, it isn’t often that average computer users can boast that their computers are helping to save lives and fight infectious disease.

Launched in 2006, the World Community Grid is in the process of creating the world’s largest public computing grid open only to public and nonprofit organizations working on projects that benefit all of humanity. The grid’s power source isn’t a few massive supercomputers tucked away in a laboratory, but hundreds of thousands of everyday computer users who decide to join and add the strength of their computers to the larger collective.

To join the grid, which is built, supported and main-



Photo by Sherry Turkle, courtesy AP/Getty Images

A man undergoes medical tests for bird flu at a medical clinic in Denpasar, on the Indonesian island of Bali, in August. Using computer modeling, researchers were able recently to confirm that cases of bird flu were spread person-to-person among an Indonesian family in 2006. Computer simulations are helping predict global infectious disease outbreaks.

tained by IBM, all a person has to do is become a member and download software onto her or his computer. The downloaded software kicks in when a computer is left idle, requesting data from a specific project, performing computations and sending the information back to the main server. As of late September, the grid had almost 350,000 members — donating time from about 750,000 computing devices — and since its launch has generated the equivalent of 114,176 years

of computations. Stan Watowich, PhD, lead researcher and associate professor of biochemistry at the University of Texas Medical Branch, is hoping grid members choose his new infectious disease project to donate their computer’s time to. “Discovering Dengue Drugs — Together,” which began in August, is using the computational power of the grid to discover treatments

for COMPUTERS, Page 10

### President Bush vetoes congressional bill SCHIP showdown jeopardizes the health of millions of kids

**P**RESIDENT Bush’s veto of legislation that would strengthen the successful State Children’s Health Insurance Program plunged the program’s funding future — as well as the health of millions of children — into uncertainty in October.

As expected, Bush vetoed the Children’s Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act of 2007, also known as H.R. 976, which was hailed by health advocates as a crucial opportunity to substantially decrease the

numbers of U.S. children who lack health insurance — now at about 9 million. With support from health care advocates, business leaders, the pub-

See SCHIP VETO, Page 14



Photo by Alan Stein, courtesy Getty Images  
Ann Crawford, of Falls Church, Va., holds a protest sign in front of the White House in October. Crawford was part of a rally by the Service Employees International Union protesting President Bush’s veto of congressional legislation that would provide new funding for the State Children’s Health Insurance Program.

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- Health care network

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- Large for-profit organization, over 100 FTEs
- National government agency



## The American Journal of Public Health

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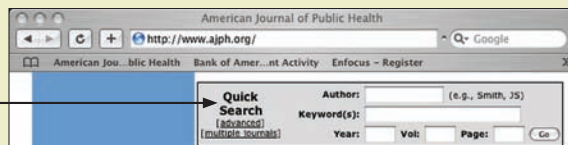


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The NATION'S HEALTH

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