

# AIDS in Asia

December 2004



1 Nicholas Street, Suite 726 Ottawa ON K1N 7B7  
Telephone: (613) 233-7440 • Fax: (613) 233-8361  
E-mail: [info@icad-cisd.com](mailto:info@icad-cisd.com) • Web: [www.icad-cisd.com](http://www.icad-cisd.com)

## Regional Overview

The latest estimates from the Joint United Nations Programme on AIDS (UNAIDS) and the World Health Organization for HIV in Asia are presented in the table below.

Parameter	Estimate	Range
Prevalent HIV Infections	8.2 million	5.4 - 11.8 million
Number of women living with HIV	2.3 million	1.5 - 3.3 million
New infections in 2004	1.2 million	720,000 - 2.4 million
AIDS deaths in 2004	540,000	350,000 - 810,000

Most countries, with the exception of Cambodia, Myanmar, and Thailand, maintain low national prevalence rates, but statistics are deceptively misleading. Many countries have such large populations that epidemics in sub-populations or individual provinces, territories, and states can go unnoticed when aggregate data is used.

The epidemics remain largely concentrated among injecting drug users (IDUs), men who have sex with men (MSM), sex workers, clients of sex workers and their sexual partners.

## Profile of the Epidemic

**India has the second highest number of people living with HIV in the world.** Latest estimates show that about 5.1 million people were living with the disease in 2004. Prevalence rates among sex workers are high (at 50% in Tamil Nadu) and in several states HIV prevalence has crossed the 1% mark among pregnant women. There are also signs that injection drug use is playing a bigger role in India's epidemics than previously thought. In Chennai, for example prevalence rate among IDUs have grown from 26% in 2000 to 64% in 2003.

**Ten million people may be infected with HIV in China by 2010 unless effective action is taken.** HIV/AIDS has spread to all 31 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities in China, yet each area has its own distinctive epidemic pattern. Though overall national HIV prevalence is low (0.1%), prevalence rates among specific populations raise serious concerns. Much of the current

spread of HIV is attributable to injection drug use and paid sex. HIV prevalence amongst drug injectors was measured at between 18% and 56% in six cities in the southern provinces of Guangdong and Guangxi. Research suggests that few brothels in China have condom policies of the sort that helped Cambodia and Thailand bring their epidemics under control and even fewer are keeping condoms on the premises.

**Three countries are facing serious nationwide epidemics: Cambodia, Myanmar, and Thailand.** The interaction between international tourism, internal travel, and the sex industry is an important factor in the spread of HIV in this region. Cambodia's national HIV prevalence (2.6%) is the highest recorded in Asia. Cambodia and Thailand mounted vigorous responses to the emerging epidemics that led to increased condom use in commercial sex, as well as fewer visits to brothels. Thailand's stunning 83% reduction in new infections from 1991 to 2003 set a powerful example for many countries to follow. But despite these efforts, coverage of prevention activities is inadequate, especially among MSM and IDUs. Evidence in Thailand suggests that spouses and partners of sex workers' clients and marginalized populations are now highly vulnerable to the spread of infection.

**Despite low national adult prevalence in Bangladesh, risky behaviour is high.** Behavioural information suggests that conditions are ripe for HIV to spread, including high rates of non-sterile injecting equipment use, high rates of commercial sex, and the lowest rates of condom use reported by female sex workers in the entire region.

**Viet Nam is experiencing an expanding HIV epidemic.** Widespread injection drug use by sex workers makes Vietnam's epidemic particularly explosive. In Ho Chi Minh City, 38% of almost 1,000 sex workers from one survey injected drugs - and fully 49% of those injecting sex workers were infected with HIV (compared with 8% who didn't use any drugs). Sex workers who use drugs are about half as likely to use condoms as those who do not use drugs.

*This information has been compiled from the following UNAIDS publications: UNAIDS at Country Level: Progress Report (September 2004), 2004 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic: 4th Global Report (June 2004), AIDS Epidemic Update 2003 (December 2003). For more information, please visit the UNAIDS website ([www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org)).*