

# AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa

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## Regional Overview

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

Parameter	Estimate	Range
Prevalent HIV Infections	25.4 million	23.4- 28.4 million
Number of women living with HIV	13.3 million	12.4 - 14.9 million
New infections in 2004	3.1 million	2.7 - 3.8 million
AIDS deaths in 2004	2.3 million	2.1 - 2.6 million

With just over 10% of the world's population, Sub-Saharan Africa is home to more than 60% of all people living with HIV. HIV prevalence varies considerably across the region - ranging from less than 1% in Mauritania to almost 40% in Botswana and Swaziland. Many countries are experiencing generalized epidemics - meaning HIV has spread to the general population, and is not confined only to high-risk groups.

The overall prevalence rate for the region has stabilized in recent years, but this should be interpreted cautiously. As the total adult population is growing, the number of HIV-infected people is also climbing, which keeps the overall HIV prevalence fairly constant and conceals important regional variations.

HIV prevalence is stable in most countries, but is rising in some countries (e.g. Madagascar and Swaziland) and declining elsewhere (e.g. Uganda). Stabilized infection levels in an epidemic often result from rising death rates from AIDS, which conceal a continuing high rate of new HIV infections.

## Profile of the Epidemic

**Women and girls are disproportionately affected.** Nowhere is the epidemic's 'feminization' more apparent than in Sub-Saharan Africa where women and girls make up almost 57% of all people infected with HIV. This unevenness is greatest among young women aged 15-24 years, who are about three times more likely to be infected than young men of the same age. The prevalence gap between genders continues to grow, driven by both social factors - including gender inequality and disempowerment - and biological factors (HIV is more easily transmitted from men to women than vice versa). Unfortunately, a very high proportion of women are being infected despite staying loyal to one partner.

**In 2003, an estimated 12.1 million orphans were living in Sub-Saharan Africa.** An orphan is defined as a child under age 18 for whom at least one parent has died. Orphaned children face increased risk of violence, exploitation and abuse. Without drastic intervention, it is predicted that by 2010 orphans will make up 15% of all children in the worst-affected countries, adding to the growing crisis of street children and child-headed households.

**AIDS is placing a massive and growing drain on local and national capacities.** By marginalizing, disabling, and killing large numbers of people in their prime, AIDS is crippling economies, hindering capacity to implement AIDS programmes and deliver effective services, and reversing recent gains in development for much of Sub-Saharan Africa. AIDS remains the biggest threat to development in the region.

**HIV infection has risen above 30% in three States in southern Africa:** Botswana (37.4%), Lesotho (31%) and Swaziland (39%). The food crises in Lesotho and Swaziland are contributing to the toll inflicted by AIDS on people already affected by malnutrition. Southern Africa remains the worst-affected region in the world. This is attributable to many factors, including poverty and social instability, low status of women, sexual violence, and high levels of mobility.

**In West Africa, the epidemic is diverse and changeable.** Many States maintain national HIV prevalence at around 1%, but this conceals the high infection levels found among certain population groups (e.g. sex workers). Nigeria, with the highest number of people living with HIV in West Africa, had a national prevalence of 5.4% in 2003. Prevalence is highest in Côte d'Ivoire (7% in 2003).

**Uganda continues to provide evidence that interventions can make a difference.** HIV prevalence dropped to 8% in Kampala - down from around 30% a decade ago. Condom use by single women almost doubled between 1995 and 2000-2001. Across the country, double-digit prevalence rates are now rare. To date, no other country has matched this achievement nationally, but prevalence rates are dropping in pregnant women in several sites in East & Central Africa, including in Rwanda, Kenya, and Ethiopia.

**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)).