

AIDS in the World

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Global Overview

Parameter	Estimate	Range
Prevalent HIV Infections	39.4 million	35.9 - 44.3 million
Number of women living with HIV	17.6 million	16.3 - 19.5 million
New infections in 2004	4.9 million	4.3 - 6.4 million
AIDS deaths in 2004	3.1 million	2.8 - 3.5 million

During 2004, the number of people living with HIV rose in every region of the world, with the steepest increases occurring in East Asia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia. In the past two years, the number of people living with HIV in East Asia rose by almost 50%, an increase attributable largely to the swiftly growing epidemic in China, Indonesia and Vietnam. Likewise, during the same period, Eastern Europe and Central Asia witnessed increases in excess of 40% due in part to the deteriorating HIV/AIDS situation in the Ukraine and the Russian Federation. With an estimated 860,000 people living with HIV at the end of 2003, Russia has the largest epidemic in Europe. Sub-Saharan Africa remains the epicenter of the epidemic with 25.4 million people living with the disease, approximately 1 million more than in 2002.

There is no single AIDS epidemic worldwide. Many regions and countries are experiencing diverse epidemics, some still in the early stages. "These latest trends firmly establish AIDS as a unique development challenge," said Dr Peter Piot, UNAIDS Executive Director on World AIDS Day 2004. "The time of quick fixes and emergency responses is over. We have to balance the emergency nature of the crisis with the need for sustainable solutions."

Women and AIDS - A Growing Challenge

This section and the following one were taken verbatim from a UNAIDS press release published just prior to World AIDS Day 2004 (see acknowledgments below)

Women are more physically susceptible to HIV infection than men. Male-to-female HIV transmission during sex is about twice as likely to occur as female-to-male transmission.

For many women in developing countries, the "ABC" prevention approach (Abstinence, Being faithful and reducing number of sexual partners, and Condom use) is insufficient. "Strategies to address gender inequalities are urgently needed if we want a realistic chance at turning back the epidemic," said Dr Piot. "Concrete action is necessary to prevent violence against women, and ensure access to property and

inheritance rights". For example, young women are three times more vulnerable to HIV infection than their male counterparts. In addition to being biologically more vulnerable to infection, many women and girls, particularly in Southern Africa, find themselves using sex as a commodity in exchange for goods, services, money, or basic necessities - often with older men. This "transactional sex" is mainly driven by poverty and the desire for a better life.

Regional Overview

There is no single "African" AIDS epidemic. The epidemics throughout the continent are highly varied. **Southern Africa** continues to be the worst-hit region with HIV prevalence rates surpassing 25%. In Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland, prevalence rates still exceed 30% among pregnant women. Life expectancy has dropped below 40 years in nine countries in the region.

Despite modest declines in HIV prevalence rates in **East Africa**, notably in Uganda and parts of Ethiopia and Kenya, the epidemic is far from being reversed. In Addis Ababa, HIV prevalence fell to 11% by 2003, down from a peak of 24% in the mid-1990s. In Kenya, HIV prevalence fell from 13.6% in 1997 to 9.4% in 2002. The **Caribbean** continues to be the second worst-affected region in the world. HIV transmission occurs largely through heterosexual sex, although sex between men, which is highly stigmatized, is also fuelling the epidemic. AIDS has become the leading cause of death among adults aged 15-44 in the region.

In **North America and Europe**, an increasing number of people are becoming infected through unprotected heterosexual sex. In the United States, AIDS disproportionately affects African American and Hispanic women, with AIDS ranked among the top three causes of death for African American women aged 35-44 years. According to AIDS Epidemic 2004, there are strong indications that the main risk factor for many women acquiring HIV is the often undisclosed risk behaviour of their male partners.

In **Western Europe**, HIV infection through heterosexual sex more than doubled between 1997 and 2002. It is feared that large numbers of HIV-infected people are still unaware of their HIV status. In the United Kingdom, HIV has become the fastest-growing serious health condition.

Injecting drug use is on the rise in many regions and contributes to an increasingly large share of new HIV infections, especially in countries with emerging epidemics in **Eastern Europe, Central Asia**, and parts of Asia.

This information has been compiled from the following UNAIDS publications: AIDS Epidemic Update December 2004 (jointly published with WHO); 2004 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic; UNAIDS press release entitled "Number of women living with HIV increases in each region of the world" dated 23 November 2004. For more information, please visit the UNAIDS website (www.unaids.org)