

AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa



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The People Infected

As of the end of 2002, the Joint United Nations Programme on AIDS (UNAIDS) and the World Health Organization (WHO) estimate that there are 29.4 million persons living with HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa. In 2001, 2.4 million people died of AIDS and there were 3.5 million new infections. This region constitutes the global epicentre of the pandemic; it is home to 70% of the people living with HIV in the world. In the absence of massively expanded prevention, care and treatment efforts, the AIDS death toll on the continent is expected to rise before peaking around the end of this decade. The worst is yet to come.

Profile of the Epidemic

- **Women are disproportionately affected.** They account for 58% of the adults living with HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa, a greater percentage than in any other region.
- **There are now four countries in southern Africa where adult HIV prevalence has risen above 30%:** Botswana (38.3%), Lesotho (31%), Swaziland (33.4%) and Zimbabwe (33.7%). The food crises in Lesotho, Swaziland and Zimbabwe are contributing to the toll inflicted by AIDS on people already affected by malnutrition.
- **The epidemic continues to make inroads in west and central Africa.** HIV prevalence exceeds 5% in eight countries, including Central African Republic (12.9%), Cameroon (11.8%), Côte d'Ivoire (9.7%) and Nigeria (5.8%).
- **The vast majority of people living with HIV/AIDS do not know they are infected.** Voluntary counselling and testing services are in short supply. Stigma and discrimination continue to discourage people from being tested.
- **AIDS remains the biggest threat to development in the region.** The ranks of skilled labourers and professionals are being hit hard. In some countries, health care systems have lost 25% of their personnel to the disease. The abilities of countries to ensure law and order is being compromised.
- **Despite the abundance of bad news, there are hopeful signs, particularly among young people, that the epidemic can eventually be brought under control.** In South Africa, the HIV prevalence rate among pregnant women under 20 fell from 20% in 1998 to 15.4% in 2001. A decline in HIV prevalence has also been detected among inner city women in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
- **Uganda continues to provide evidence that interventions can make a difference.** HIV infection rates appear to be declining in several parts of the country. HIV prevalence among 15-19-year-old pregnant women continues to drop. Condom use by single women almost doubled between 1995 and 2000-2001.
- **Nineteen African governments have set up national AIDS bodies at senior levels.** Forty countries have completed national strategic plans for AIDS. Regional bodies in Africa are tackling AIDS as a development issue.
- **Only a tiny fraction of the millions of Africans in need of antiretroviral treatment are receiving it.** Many millions are not receiving treatments for opportunistic infections either. UNAIDS and WHO have said that these figures reflect the world's continuing failure to mount a response that matches the scale and severity of the global AIDS epidemic.
- **Botswana remains the only country in Africa to adopt a policy of making antiretroviral therapies available to all who need them.** However, only about 2,000 people are currently benefiting from this commitment. A handful of companies in southern Africa have announced schemes to provide antiretroviral therapies to workers and some family members.

ICAD's aim is to lessen the impact of HIV/AIDS in resource-poor communities and countries. We are a coalition of Canadian international development organizations, AIDS service organizations and other interested organizations and individuals. Funding for this publication was provided by Health Canada. The views expressed herein are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Minister of Health. Most of the information in this fact sheet is taken from information released by the United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the World Health Organization for World AIDS Day 2002. Additional copies of this fact sheet are available on the ICAD website at www.icad-cisd.com. Le feuillet "Le sida en Afrique subsaharienne" est disponible en français.