

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 10:30 GMT, 21 NOVEMBER 2005**

## **NORTH AMERICA, WESTERN AND CENTRAL EUROPE**

*The number of people living with HIV in North America, Western and Central Europe rose to 1.9 million in 2005, with approximately 65,000 people having acquired HIV in the past year. Wide availability of antiretroviral therapy has helped keep AIDS deaths comparatively low, at about 30,000 in 2005.*

- Overall, prevention efforts are lagging behind changing epidemics in several countries where the main patterns of HIV transmission have been shifting. Although unsafe sex between men and, in a minority of countries, injecting drug use remain important conduits for HIV, increasing numbers of people are being infected through unprotected heterosexual intercourse.
- The estimated number of people living with HIV in the **United States of America** at the end of 2003 exceeded one million for the first time. This reflects the fact that people with HIV are living longer due to antiretroviral treatment, as well as the failure to adapt and sustain the prevention successes achieved during the epidemic's first 10-15 years.
- In the **USA**, unprotected sex between men remains the dominant mode of transmission, accounting for 63% of newly-diagnosed HIV infections in 2003. Injecting drug use accounted for around 20% of new infections in the same year. For women living with HIV, unsafe heterosexual intercourse is the main mode of transmission—an estimated 73% acquired the virus in that manner in 2003.
- As in the **UK**, one quarter of people living with HIV in the **USA** are believed to be unaware that they are infected, and that ignorance is very likely adding impetus to the epidemic.
- African Americans accounted for 48% of new HIV cases in the **USA** in 2003. African American women are more than a dozen times as likely to be infected with HIV than their white counterparts. Among young men who have sex with men, HIV prevalence among African Americans (at 32%) is more than four times that among white counterparts (7%) and more than twice that among Latino counterparts (14%). One half of the people who died of AIDS in 2003 were African Americans.
- Although in the **USA** AIDS therapy has saved nearly two million years of life according to on recent calculation, African Americans appear not to be benefiting equally from such life-prolonging treatment. According to a recent study, African Americans are half as likely to be receiving antiretroviral treatment compared with other population groups. AIDS has become one of the top three causes of death for African American men aged 25–54 and for African American women aged 25–34.
- In **Canada** just under 58,000 HIV diagnoses had been reported by the end of 2004. The number of reported new annual HIV infections has risen by 20% in the past five years, and women now comprise over one quarter of new diagnoses. This corresponds to the growing proportion of HIV diagnoses attributable to heterosexual transmission (30% in 2004).

- More than half a million people are living with HIV in **Western Europe**, and that number continues to grow amid signs in several countries of a resurgence of risky sexual behaviour. The biggest change in **Western Europe** has been the emergence of heterosexual contact as the dominant cause of new HIV infections in several countries. Of the more than 20,000 newly diagnosed HIV infections in 2004, more than one third were in women. A large proportion of new diagnoses are in people originating from countries with serious epidemics, principally countries in sub-Saharan Africa.
- There are several reasons for the doubling of new diagnoses of HIV in the **United Kingdom** since 2000 (from 3,499 in that year to 7,258 in 2004). Increased testing is one of them but most of the increase is due to a steep rise in the number of heterosexually-acquired HIV infections, approximately 80% of which were contracted in high-prevalence countries.
- Once the primary mode of transmission, unsafe sex between men still accounts for roughly one quarter of new HIV diagnoses in the **UK** (1,900 in 2004) amid signs that high-risk sexual behaviour has not decreased.
- Sex between men remains an important factor in the epidemics in **France** and the **Netherlands**, and in **Belgium, Denmark, Portugal** and **Switzerland** there has been a slight, and in **Germany** a significant, rise in the number of annual new HIV infections attributed to sex between men. In **Germany**, new HIV infections in men who have sex with men almost doubled from 2001 to 2004 (from 530 to 982) and unsafe sex between men is the main cause of the steady increase overall in new HIV diagnosis in **Germany**, which tallied 2,058 in 2004 (44% more than the 1,425 cases diagnosed in 2001).
- In **Spain** HIV cases among drug injectors dropped steeply in the 1990s after methadone treatment and needle-exchange projects had been introduced. New HIV infections among drug injectors have also dropped sharply in **Portugal** (1,000 in 2004, compared with 2,400 in 2000), and they comprised just over one third of new HIV diagnoses in 2004 (compared with almost one half as recently as 2002).
- Among HIV infections attributed to heterosexual contact in **France** during 2003, 69% were migrants, almost two thirds (65%) of who were women. All in all, in the 18 western European countries with HIV data for 2004, women comprised 35% of all new diagnoses, up from 29% in 2000.
- Overall in **Central Europe**, the epidemics have remained contained and small. About half the cases in which a mode of transmission was identified in 2004 were due to unprotected heterosexual intercourse, but in a handful of countries—including the **Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia**, and the **Slovak Republic**—sex between men appears to be the main mode of HIV transmission.
- **Western Europe** and **North America** remain the only regions in the world where most people in need of antiretroviral treatment are able to receive it. As a result, the number of AIDS deaths plummeted in the late 1990s. In Western Europe, that trend has persisted, with deaths among AIDS cases decreasing steeply from 3,905 in 2000 to 2,252 in 2004—a 42% drop.

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