

NEW UNAIDS REPORT UNVEILS LATEST GLOBAL EPIDEMIC TRENDS

1.1 million people infected with HIV in Asia last year alone

London, 6 July 2004 – UNAIDS warned that the number of people living with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, has risen in every region of the world and last year five million people became newly infected with HIV -- more people than any previous year.

These findings are contained in the *2004 UNAIDS Report of the global AIDS epidemic*, released today in advance of the XV International AIDS Conference, to be held in Bangkok from 11-16 July 2004. The new report represents the most accurate picture of AIDS to date due to the more comprehensive country surveillance data and improved methods for estimating HIV rates.

“Despite increased funding, political commitment and progress in expanding access to HIV treatment over the past two years, the AIDS epidemic continues to outpace the global response,” said Dr Peter Piot, UNAIDS Executive Director, at the press launch of the report. Since the 2002 AIDS Conference in Barcelona, more than nine million people have become infected and six million have died of AIDS. “These numbers demonstrate the enormity of the challenge in both preventing millions of infections and treating those living with HIV,” added Dr Piot. “Until we recognize AIDS as the development and security issue of our time, we will not succeed in beating the epidemic.”

The number of people living with HIV continues to grow – from 35 million in 2001 to 38 million in 2003. The 2004 UNAIDS report highlights the latest global trends and, for the first time, features revised HIV prevalence rates for previous years, allowing for a better understanding of how the epidemic is spreading.

For the first time, the report compares new estimates for 2003 with revised estimates for 2001 based on improved methodologies. This is the best way we know how to obtain a more accurate picture of the AIDS epidemic. Although the new global estimates are slightly lower than the previously published estimates, the actual number of people living with HIV has not decreased; rather the epidemic continues to grow based on revised 2001 estimates.

“There is no time to misread the signals, with Asia facing life and death choices in preventing a full-blown AIDS catastrophe in the region,” said Dr Piot. “Equally alarming, infections in Africa continue to increase and people are dying in large numbers.”

Trends in the Global Epidemic

- 1.1 million people in **Asia** became infected with HIV last year alone – more than any previous year. The epidemic is expanding rapidly in this region, with sharp increases in HIV infections in China, Indonesia and Viet Nam. With 60% of the world's population, Asia's fast-growing epidemic has global implications.
- **India**, with an estimated 5.1 million people living with HIV, is home to one in seven HIV-positive people worldwide. This represents the largest number of people infected outside of South Africa.
- An estimated 25 million people are living with HIV in **sub-Saharan Africa**. There appears to be stabilization in HIV prevalence rates; but this is actually due to a rise in AIDS deaths and a continued increase in new infections.
- In **Latin America**, some 1.6 million people are living with HIV and the epidemic tends to be concentrated mainly among populations at increased risk of HIV exposure, such as injecting drug users and men who have sex with men. Low national prevalence is disguising some serious epidemics. For example, in Brazil -- the region's most populous country, and home to more than one in four people living with HIV – national prevalence is well below 1%. However, in some cities, infection levels above 60% were reported among injecting drug users.
- **Eastern Europe and Central Asia** continue to have expanding epidemics. Some 1.3 million people are living with HIV. **Russia**, with over three million injecting drug users, remains one of the worst-affected countries in the region. But women account for an increasing share of newly diagnosed cases of HIV -- up from one-in-four in 2001 to just one-in-three one year later. The epidemic's most striking feature is the age of those infected – more than 80% are under 30. Condom use is generally low among this group. By contrast, in **North America and Western Europe**, only 30% of infected people are under 30.
- In addition, the report finds that infections are also on the rise in the **United States and Western Europe**. In the US, an estimated 950,000 people are living with HIV, up from 900,000 in 2001. Half of all new infections in recent years have been among African Americans. In Western Europe, 580,000 people are living with HIV compared to 540,000 in 2001.

Global AIDS Funding

In addition to providing up-to-date global, regional and country data, the report releases new estimates on resources needed to effectively combat the epidemic in the developing world. For the first time, the revised estimates reflect data obtained from 78 countries, many on the frontlines of the AIDS epidemic.

Although global spending on AIDS has increased 15-fold from US\$300 million in 1996 to just under US\$5 billion in 2003, it is less than half of what will be needed by 2005 in developing countries. According to newly revised costing estimates, an estimated US\$12 billion (up from US\$10 billion) will be needed by 2005 and US\$20 billion by 2007 for prevention and care in low- and middle-income countries.

The estimated US\$20 billion would provide antiretroviral therapy to just over six million people (over four million in sub-Saharan Africa), support for 22 million orphans, HIV voluntary counseling and testing for 100 million adults, school-based AIDS education for 900 million students and peer counseling services for 60 million young people not in school. About 43% of these resources will be needed in sub-Saharan Africa, 28% in Asia, 17% in Latin American and the Caribbean, 9% in Eastern Europe, and 1% in North Africa and the Near East.

Fully funding the response to AIDS will require an extraordinary effort, which cannot be met from currently planned regular domestic and international development budgets. It will require extraordinary leadership and will have to use currently untapped resources.

Treatment and prevention challenge

Despite considerable progress over the past few years, access to HIV treatment remains low, according to the report. Treatment access must be a reality for those who need it. Only 7% of people in developing countries have access to antiretroviral treatment – fewer than one in ten.

As part of addressing this global health emergency, UNAIDS, WHO and their partners are fully committed to providing antiretrovirals to three million people by the end of 2005. This “3 by 5 Initiative” is part of a global movement to expand access to HIV treatment – the ultimate goal being universal access. To date, some 56 countries are formally participating in the Initiative.

Expanding access to treatment is an incentive for people to get tested and know their HIV status. It also reduces stigma, and can potentially offer prevention services to millions of people. However, the current reach of HIV testing in developing countries is very poor -- only one in nine people have access.

“Today, only one out of five people worldwide has access to HIV prevention services,” said Dr Piot. “The global movement for expanding access to HIV treatment must be matched with an equally strong effort to expand access to effective prevention services. More importantly, prevention must be integrated into treatment scale up efforts.”

Obstacles and challenges

Key obstacles and challenges to mounting effective national AIDS responses include AIDS-related stigma and discrimination, lack of human and institutional capacity, and lack of donor coordination.

Stigma also acts as a constraint in countries channeling funds to where they are needed most, particularly targeting populations at increased risk of HIV infection. In some countries in Latin America and Asia, prevention programmes have not targeted injecting drug users and men who have sex with men, among the groups most vulnerable to HIV in those regions.

Several countries in southern Africa face a growing crisis in delivering vital public services that are crucial to the AIDS response. Reasons for this range from migration of key staff from public to private sectors, migration abroad, to the deadly impact of the AIDS epidemic itself.

As the number of AIDS funding and implementing agencies increases, there is also an urgent need to deal with the now well-documented risks of duplication of the response at a country level. In an effort to achieve greater harmonization of AIDS funding, UNAIDS led an effort with the US, UK and other leading donor countries to agree to what is known as the “Three Ones” – one national AIDS plan, one national AIDS authority and one monitoring and evaluation system in each country.

“Promoting effective coordination among donors is the key to saving lives in developing countries,” said Dr Piot. “We have fought hard to raise the money, now we must work just as hard to spend it wisely.”

Around the World: 2004 Facts and Figures

- US\$12 billion will be needed by 2005 to effectively fight AIDS in developing countries – but current annual global spending amounts to less than half (at under US\$5 billion). By 2007, an estimated US\$20 billion will be needed.
- With 60% of the world's population, Asia is home to some of the fastest-growing epidemics in the world with 1.1 million new infections in 2003 alone -- the most in a single year to date in Asia.
- Although Africa is home to 10% of the world's population, it has 70% of people living with HIV worldwide. If current infection rates continue, without access to treatment, 60% of today's 15 year olds will not reach their 60th birthday.
- Close to 38 million adults and children are living with HIV worldwide -- an increase from 35 million in 2001. Over 20 million people have died of AIDS over the past two decades.
- Since the Barcelona AIDS Conference in 2002, an additional 9.2 million people have become infected and 5.6 million people have died of AIDS.
- An estimated 15 million children under age 18 worldwide have lost one or both parents to AIDS – 12 million of them in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Women account for nearly half of all people living with HIV and 57% in sub-Saharan Africa.
- Of the 10 million young people living with HIV worldwide, 6.2 million live in sub-Saharan Africa – 75% of whom are young women.
- Prevention programmes reach fewer than one in five people who need them. Comprehensive prevention could avert 29 million of the 45 million new infections projected by 2010.
- The current supply of condoms is 40% short of what is needed. By 2015, an estimated 19 billion condoms will be needed to prevent HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.
- Five to six million people need HIV treatment in low- and middle-income countries, yet only 7% -- or 400,000 people -- had access by end 2003.

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