

HIV RATES DECLINE IN ZIMBABWE

Geneva, 10 October 2005 – A review of epidemiological and behavioural data commissioned by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and other international partners has found preliminary indications of declining trends in HIV prevalence¹ and incidence² in Zimbabwe over the last five years.

The UNAIDS review will be officially published by early December as soon as final data is incorporated.

A review team assessed a wide variety of data to ascertain whether reports of downward trends in HIV rates were accurate. According to the review, the prevalence rate among pregnant women has decreased from 24.6% to 21.3% between 2002 and 2004. Other research suggests a decline in the prevalence rate over the past five years.

The review of data suggests that several elements of behavior change may have played a part in the apparent decline. It appears as if there could have been a reduction in the reported number of sexual partners in recent years and an increase in condom use with non-regular partners.

UNAIDS sees the evidence of decline as encouraging, but underlines that the challenge now is to ensure that the downward trend in Zimbabwe is sustained. UNAIDS also stresses that this evidence of declining rates is no reason for complacency. HIV prevalence rates in Zimbabwe are still among the highest in the world and infection rates could start rising again if underlying vulnerabilities, which contribute to unsafe sexual behaviour and fuel the epidemic, are not sufficiently addressed. Such vulnerabilities include gender inequality, poverty and population mobility.

UNAIDS will work with all stakeholders in Zimbabwe to investigate the specific interventions that have led to the decline and ensure that they be sustained.

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¹ Percentage of adult population (aged 15-49) living with HIV

² Number of new HIV infections