

# HIV/AIDS



**Background Briefs**  
Development issues and efforts

## The issue

The human body's immune system protects it from diseases. HIV is a virus that attacks that immune system. Over a period of years, HIV can weaken the immune system until it can no longer fight usually harmless bacteria and viruses. When that happens, HIV grows into AIDS. There is no cure for AIDS and currently there is no vaccine to prevent the HIV infection. People living with HIV can take drugs to delay the onset of AIDS.

AIDS is a deadly disease and continues to be a global health issue. Since 1981, more than 25 million people have died from the disease.

HIV infection is preventable since it is not an easily transmitted virus. It is not transmitted through air, food or water, or through everyday social contact. You cannot get the HIV virus by shaking hands, sneezing or touching. It must enter the bloodstream for it to infect a person. There are a limited number of ways a person can transmit or be infected by HIV.

The incidence of HIV/AIDS is slowly declining. There were 2.7 million new HIV infections globally in 2007, down from 3.5 million in 1996. About 2.6 million people became infected with HIV in 2009. In spite of the slow decline, 33 million people worldwide still live with HIV. Two thirds of them are in sub-Saharan Africa, and more than half are women. In 2008, there were an estimated 2 million deaths worldwide from AIDS. An estimated 1.8 million people died of AIDS in 2009.

Sub-Saharan Africa has been hardest hit by the epidemic; in 2009, over two thirds of AIDS deaths were in this region.

In countries most severely affected, the epidemic has had a devastating impact on societies, economies and infrastructures. Life expectancy is lower by as much as 20 years. Young adults are the most at-risk population. Because of this, many countries face a slowdown in economic growth and an increase in household poverty. In Asia, HIV and AIDS cause a greater loss of productivity than any other disease. Many of the young adults who died from AIDS left children behind. In sub-Saharan Africa, the AIDS epidemic has orphaned nearly 15 million children.

## The road to overcoming HIV/AIDS

Although antiretroviral drugs delay the onset of AIDS, these drugs are not always available. In many countries, access to prevention and treatment services is limited. Global leaders have pledged to work toward universal access to HIV prevention and care in order to prevent millions of deaths.

In recent years, the response to the epidemic has increased. Spending for HIV and AIDS grew by 6 times in low- and middle-income countries. The number of people on antiretroviral treatment increased and the annual number of AIDS deaths declined. The global percentage of people infected with HIV is also levelling off.



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These achievements should not lead to complacent attitudes. In all parts of the world, people living with HIV still face AIDS-related stigma and discrimination. Many people still cannot access sufficient HIV treatment and care. In a number of developed countries, infection rates are rising. This suggests that HIV prevention is just as important now as ever. Prevention efforts proven to be effective need to be scaled-up and treatment targets reached. Commitments from national governments right down to the community level need to be strengthened and met, so one day the world might see an end to the global AIDS epidemic.

### Projects for overcoming HIV/AIDS

The HIV/AIDS pandemic affects people from all walks of life in the prime of their lives. It also has a devastating impact on the economic, social and political well-being of societies.

In spite of the huge burden of this disease, there are signs of hope and progress in the global fight against HIV/AIDS. New drugs and treatment and better access to health services and education are beginning to help people protect themselves against HIV.

One of the goals of the Millennium Development Goals is halting and reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015. Canada is a strong supporter of these goals.

Between 2006 and 2009, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) provided over \$650 million in funding to support the implementation of initiatives that respond effectively to HIV/AIDS in the developing world.

**Employment opportunities:** In South Africa, CIDA supported a project to help people

in HIV/AIDS-affected communities obtain permanent jobs. The project provided better access to credit and business opportunities. In total, 600 women, men and orphans and at-risk children affected by HIV/AIDS benefited from the project.

**Access to drug treatment:** CIDA is helping to support a project to increase access to drug treatment in Malawi. By the end of 2007, there were 435 medical sites, compared to 146 in 2004, and 146 856 HIV-positive Malawians were receiving antiretroviral therapy treatment, compared to 3000 in 2003.

**Reducing the risk of spreading HIV:** In Haiti, 2.2 percent of people have HIV/AIDS, the highest percentage in the Americas. The rate of HIV/AIDS is even more alarming in Cité Soleil, a slum in Haiti, where the figure is 5.6 percent. CIDA is supporting a project to reduce the risk of HIV transmission. Some 4700 people chose to be tested for the virus. Of this number, 10 percent tested HIV-positive and all of them have access to a treatment program.

Canada is committed to a coordinated global response to HIV/AIDS. By working with partners and aligning with the governments of developing countries, Canada is fighting HIV/AIDS in a harmonized way to reach those at risk more efficiently.

Find more information about:

- CIDA projects that work toward overcoming HIV/AIDS at <http://www.acdi-cida.gc.ca/acdi-cida/ACDI-CIDA.nsf/En/JUD-111810358-LAH>
- HIV/AIDS at <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/iyh-vsv/diseases-maladies/hiv-vih-eng.php>.

