

HIV/AIDS

The global pandemic

Each year around World AIDS Day, UNAIDS releases new estimates on the state of the global HIV/AIDS pandemic. According to the report released on Dec. 1, 2003, an estimated 40 million people are living with HIV worldwide, including about 2.3 million children under the age of 15. An estimated five million people were newly infected and an estimated three million died as a result of AIDS in 2003. Every day about 14,000 people were newly infected, with more than 95 per cent of those living in low and middle income countries.

An estimated 26.6 million people were living with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa with 3.2 million new infections. Women are disproportionately affected in this region where almost 60 per cent of those infected are women and where women aged 15-24 are 2.5 times more likely to be infected than men of the same age.

Recent increases in cases in China, Indonesia, Russia, Vietnam, and India show how suddenly an epidemic can erupt wherever intravenous drug use occurs. It also illustrates the urgent need to increase prevention efforts before the epidemic spreads beyond high risk groups.

Canada's sixth annual report on HIV/AIDS released on World AIDS Day 2003 shows that the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Canada continues to grow in scope and complexity. At the end of 2002, 56,000 people were living with HIV infection, an increase of 12 per cent since 1999. The HIV epidemic affects many groups of Canadians, including gay men, Aboriginal people, injection drug users, people in prisons, and people from countries where HIV is endemic.

Canada's contribution to the global response

Through the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Health Canada and the Department of Foreign Affairs, Canada is working with the global community to ensure that the goals set out in the UN Declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS are met.

Canada is also committed to implementing the World Trade Organization's decision of Aug. 30, 2003, with respect to greater access to medicines for the developing world. On Feb. 12, 2004, legislation was re-introduced to amend the Patent Act and the Food and Drug Act. These amendments will give Canadian manufacturers access to compulsory licences for patented products and allow them to provide low-cost medicines to developing countries.