

Sub-Saharan Africa

Latest epidemiological trends

- Sub-Saharan Africa remains the region most heavily affected by HIV worldwide, accounting for two thirds (67%) of all people living with HIV and for three quarters (75%) of AIDS deaths in 2007.
- An estimated 1.9 million [1.6–2.1 million] people were newly infected with HIV in sub-Saharan Africa in 2007, bringing to 22 million [20.5–23.6 million] the number of people living with HIV.
- Sub-Saharan Africa's epidemics vary significantly from country to country—with most appearing to have stabilized, although often at very high levels, particularly in **southern Africa**.
- The nine countries in **southern Africa** continue to bear a disproportionate share of the global AIDS burden—35% of HIV infections and 38% of AIDS deaths in 2007 happened there.
- The HIV epidemics in **Malawi**, **South Africa** and **Zambia** also appear to have stabilized. Although **South Africa's**, with an estimated 5.7 million people living with HIV, continues to be the largest epidemic in the world.
- In **Mozambique**, the epidemic continues to grow—in some of its provinces in the central and southern zones of the country, adult HIV prevalence has reached or exceeded 20%, while infections continue to increase among young people (ages 15-21).
- Most of the comparatively smaller HIV epidemics in West Africa are stable or are declining—as is the case for **Burkina Faso**, **Côte d'Ivoire**, **Mali**, and **Nigeria**.
- HIV prevalence in the comparatively smaller epidemics in East Africa have either stabilized or are receding. After dropping dramatically in the 1990s, **Uganda's** adult HIV prevalence appears to have stabilized at 5.4%. However, there are signs of a possible resurgence in sexual risk-taking that could cause the epidemic to grow again.
- Reductions in HIV prevalence are especially striking in **Zimbabwe**, where HIV prevalence in pregnant women attending antenatal clinics fell from 26% in 2002 to 18% in 2006. In **Botswana**, a drop in HIV prevalence among pregnant 15-19-year-olds from 25% in 2001 to 18% in 2006 suggests that the rate of new infections could be slowing.

Main modes of HIV transmission

- Heterosexual intercourse remains the epidemic's driving force in sub-Saharan Africa. However, recent epidemiological evidence has revealed the region's epidemic to be more diverse than previously thought:
 - Sex work is an important factor in many of West Africa's HIV epidemics. More than one third (35%) of female sex workers surveyed in 2006 in **Mali** were living with HIV, and infection levels exceeding 20% have been documented among sex workers in Senegal and **Burkina Faso**.
 - Injecting drug use is a factor to some extent in several of the epidemics in East and southern Africa, including **Mauritius**, where the use of contaminated injecting

equipment is the main cause of HIV infection. In various studies, about half of the injecting drug users tested in the **Kenyan** cities of Mombassa (50%) and Nairobi (53%) were HIV positive.

- Several recent studies suggest that unprotected sex between men is probably a more important factor in sub-Saharan Africa's HIV epidemics than is commonly thought. For example in **Zambia**, one in three (33%) surveyed men who have sex with men tested HIV-positive.

Additional country data¹

- As stated above, several studies reveal **Zimbabwe's** epidemic has declined in recent years, with a significant drop in HIV prevalence in pregnant women, from 26% in 2002 to 18% in 2006. Among young pregnant women (15–24 years), prevalence fell from 21% to 14% over the same period. These figures mirror the most recent population-based HIV survey (2005-2006) that estimated national adult (15–49 years) HIV prevalence at 18%. The decline in HIV incidence is being partially linked to reports of safer sexual behaviour, with evidence of more people avoiding sex with non-regular partners and of decreasing numbers of adult men paying for sex.
- Reflecting similar trends from other countries in the region, young women in **South Africa** face greater risks of becoming infected than men: among 15–24-year-olds, they account for around 90% of new HIV infections.
- **Swaziland's** national adult HIV prevalence of 26% is the highest in the world.
- The latest data coming from **Angola** indicate that HIV prevalence among pregnant women was similar in 2004 and 2005, pointing to a possible stabilization of the epidemic.
- Among the recent improvements in **Rwanda's** HIV response is the expansion of services for preventing HIV transmission from mothers to children, which are now available in more than half of the country's health facilities.
- In both **Burkina Faso** and **Côte d'Ivoire**, there is evidence of a shift towards behaviours that can limit the spread of HIV. Condom use during sex with a non-regular partner increased substantially for women—from 39% to 53% between 1998–1999 and 2003 in the former, and from 21% to 34% between 1998 and 2005 in the latter.
- Studies from **Benin** show that women and men who had sex with a non-regular partner were more likely to use condoms when doing so. Condom use in higher risk sex rose from 9% to 25% for women and from 22% to 40% for men between 1996 and 2006.

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¹ From *Sub-Saharan Africa: AIDS epidemic update 2007, regional summary*