

Press statement

New data show growing AIDS epidemic in China

Beijing, 25 January 2006 – China's AIDS epidemic shows no signs of abating with an estimated 70,000 new HIV infections occurring in 2005, according to a report released today by the Chinese Ministry of Health, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the World Health Organization.

The latest data indicate that 650,000 (range 540,000 to 760,000) people are now living with HIV in China and that overall HIV prevalence is now estimated at approximately 0.05 per cent.

UNAIDS and WHO stress that the prevalence of HIV is not falling in China. The difference between the 2003 estimate of 840,000 (range 650,000 to 1,020,000) and the 2005 estimate of 650,000 (range 540,000 to 760,000) is due to improved HIV data collection and a better estimate of the most 'at-risk populations' in the country – including injecting drug users and sex workers.

UNAIDS and WHO consider that the methods used in the 2005 revision of the national estimates are appropriate. China has greatly expanded and improved its surveillance system in recent years from 194 sites in 2003 to 329 in 2005, and increased the population groups covered. More data sources are now considered, including population size estimation data, special studies and behavioural surveillance.

The new numbers should not mask the fact that HIV infections are on the rise. New infections are increasing by 70,000 (range 60,000- 80,000) per year. An upward trend can be seen if the figures for 2003 are recalculated using more complete data and better estimates of the size of groups at risk of being infected. There is clearly no room for complacency. Intensified prevention efforts are needed to stop the further spread of HIV in China and to keep the overall HIV prevalence low.

The majority of all estimated HIV infections (approximately 80 per cent) are related to injecting drug use and commercial sex. The epidemic is equally or more serious than previously thought in all parts of China, except in central China where HIV transmission in connection with the sale of blood and blood plasma may have been overestimated in the past.

The report released today presents the new estimates of people living with HIV and AIDS in China. It also provides background and context to the new estimates, including a brief update on the response to the epidemic as well as the challenges for the future.

UNAIDS and WHO commend the Chinese government for working to improve its monitoring systems and arrive at a more accurate understanding of the epidemic and urge that the results of the estimation exercise be used to raise awareness and to support the further scaling up of HIV prevention, treatment and care programmes across the country. China will continue to face challenges in surveillance and monitoring of the epidemic, and improvements in this area can and should be implemented in the future.

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The new report can be accessed at <http://www.unchina.org/unaids/enews.html> and <http://www.unaids.org>