

Caribbean

Latest epidemiological trends

- In 2007, an estimated 230 000 [210 000–270 000] people were living with HIV, while an estimated 20 000 [16 000–25 000] were newly infected, and some 14 000 [11 000–16 000] died of AIDS-related illnesses.
- Although surveillance systems are largely inadequate in several countries, available data indicate that most of the HIV epidemics in the Caribbean appear to have stabilized, while a few have declined in urban areas—this is particularly evident in the **Dominican Republic** and **Haiti**. Both countries are home to the largest epidemics in the region.
- At the end of 2007, an estimated 30 000 people living with HIV were receiving antiretroviral treatment in the region—a 50% increase since end-2006, when 20 000 people were on treatment.¹

Main modes of HIV transmission

- Unprotected heterosexual intercourse is the region's main driver of HIV transmission, however, unprotected sex between men is also a significant factor in several epidemics.
- As many as one in eight (12%) reported HIV infections in the region occurred through unprotected sex between men. It reportedly represents the main driver in **Cuba**, and studies in **Trinidad** and **Tobago** have found HIV prevalence of 20% among men who have sex with men.
- In the **Dominican Republic**, surveys have indicated that more sex workers are protecting themselves – and their clients – against HIV, especially in the main urban and tourist centres. Among female sex workers, HIV prevalence of 9% has been documented in **Jamaica** and 31% in **Guyana**.

Additional country data²

- AIDS remains one of the leading causes of death among people aged 25 to 44 years in the Caribbean, but the scaling up of antiretroviral treatment could be reducing the numbers of HIV-positive people progressing to AIDS and eventually dying of AIDS-related illnesses.
- The Caribbean epidemics occur in the context of high levels of poverty and unemployment, gender and other inequalities, and considerable stigma—all of which can fuel the spread of HIV, as well as hinder efforts to control the epidemics.
- The scaling up of prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV programmes in several countries, including **Barbados**, **Guyana** and **Jamaica**, has significantly reduced the rate of transmission to infants.

¹ From *Towards Universal Access: Scaling Up Priority HIV/AIDS Interventions in the Health Sector*, June 2007.

² From *Caribbean: AIDS epidemic update 2007, regional summary*

- **Guyana**'s programme to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV is also expanding, with about 94 sites offering such services in eight regions. In a 2006 survey, about 80% of pregnant women accepted prevention of mother-to-child transmission services when offered.
- All pregnant women in **Cuba** are tested for HIV, and those that test HIV-positive receive antiretroviral drugs to reduce the risk of transmission to their babies.
- In contrast to the rest of the region, injecting drug use is the key factor in HIV transmission in **Bermuda** and **Puerto Rico**'s epidemics. Very high HIV prevalence is still being found among people who inject drugs in **Puerto Rico**, where the rate of HIV infection (26 per 100 000) is twice that of the United States mainland and where more than two thirds of HIV infections have been among men.

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