

Latin America

Latest epidemiological trends

- New HIV infections in 2007 totalled an estimated 140 000 [88 000–190 000], bringing to 1.7 million [1.5–2.1 million] the number of people living with HIV in Latin America. An estimated 63 000 [49 000–98 000] people died of AIDS-related illnesses last year.
- The region's biggest epidemics are in the countries with the largest populations, notably **Brazil**, which is home to more than 40% (730 000 [600 000–890 000]) of people living with the virus, followed by **Mexico** with 200 000 [150 000–310 000] HIV-positive people.
- The HIV epidemics in Latin America remain generally stable, changing little in the past decade, but HIV transmission in the region is occurring mainly among men who have sex with men, sex workers, and (to a lesser extent) people who inject drugs.

Main modes of HIV transmission

- Hidden epidemics of HIV among men who have sex with men are happening in several Central America countries—in **Mexico** more than half (57%) of the HIV diagnoses to date in the country have been attributed to unprotected sex between men.
- Studies have found high levels of HIV prevalence among female sex workers in **Honduras** (10%), **Guatemala** (4%) and **El Salvador** (3%). However, there is some recent evidence of a steep decline in HIV prevalence among female sex workers in Honduras, where condom promotion efforts were stepped up in recent years.
- Increasing numbers of women are becoming infected with the virus in several countries. In **Uruguay**, unprotected sex is estimated to account for two thirds of newly reported HIV cases, with most women becoming infected by male sexual partners who acquired HIV during unprotected sex with another man or through use of contaminated needles or syringes.
- HIV transmission as a result of injecting drug use still features in several of South America's epidemics, although regionally, this mode of transmission appears to be accounting for a smaller number of new infections than was the case previously. In **Argentina**, for example, injecting drug use accounted for only about 5% of new HIV infections in Buenos Aires between 2003 and 2005.

Additional country data¹

- HIV surveillance efforts need to be improved in many countries of this region to enable a better understanding of current epidemic trends.
- Although **Brazil** is home to about one third of all people living with HIV in Latin America, a simultaneous focus on ensuring access to both HIV prevention and treatment services has helped keep its epidemic stable. Meanwhile, widespread access to antiretroviral therapy halved AIDS mortality rates between 1996 and 2002.

¹ From *Latin America: AIDS epidemic update 2007, regional summary*

- High HIV prevalence has been found among prisoners in **Brazil**. Almost 6% of male inmates tested at a São Paulo penitentiary were found to be HIV-positive. Levels of HIV knowledge among prison inmates appear to be high, but access to HIV prevention services inside prisons remains inadequate.
- In recent years unprotected sex in **Argentina** has become the main route of HIV transmission. Mirroring other countries in the region, the highest HIV prevalence has been found among men who have sex with men.
- In **Uruguay**, unprotected sex (mostly heterosexual) accounts for an estimated two thirds of reported HIV cases. Infection levels are also high among certain groups in the capital of Montevideo: HIV prevalence of 22% among men who have sex with men, and 19% among people who inject drugs.
- In **Chile**, most HIV infections are in men, although increasing numbers of women are acquiring HIV from their male partners, who were probably infected during unprotected sex with other men. Studies published in 2007 have found HIV prevalence to be low among female sex workers; therefore, unsafe heterosexual paid sex probably accounts for only a small percentage of current HIV infections.
- Sex between men continues to represent the main route of HIV transmission in **Bolivia, Columbia, Ecuador, and Peru**.

Contact:

Sophie Barton-Knott | tel. +41 22 791 1697 | bartonknotts@unaids.org | www.unaids.org