

Press release

National HIV prevention programmes can become more successful using combination prevention approaches—this will help make the money work effectively during tough economic times

New HIV incidence analyses helps sharpen prevention efforts

Geneva, 28 November 2008 – On the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the first observance of World AIDS Day, a new report by UNAIDS calls on countries to realign HIV prevention programmes through understanding how the most recent HIV infections were transmitted, and understanding the reasons why they occurred.

“Not only will this approach help prevent the next 1,000 infections in each community, but it will also make money for AIDS work more effectively and help put forward a long term and sustainable AIDS response,” said UNAIDS Executive Director Dr Peter Piot.

Findings from countries that have conducted studies on the modes of transmission and developed incidence estimates have highlighted three broad trends: First, patterns of epidemics can change over time and therefore such analyses must be undertaken at regular intervals. Second, in many sub-Saharan African countries with HIV high prevalence, new infections occur mainly as a result of having multiple sex partners and among discordant couples, that is where one partner is HIV positive and one is HIV negative. And finally, in many countries, even with high HIV prevalence among the general population, substantial numbers of new infections might also occur in populations at higher risk of exposure to HIV, including sex workers and their clients, injecting drug users, and men who have sex with men—groups who often receive little attention in prevention initiatives.

“The results of the modes of transmission study have assisted us in understanding the key drivers of the epidemic in Lesotho, said Keketso Sefeane, Chief Executive of the National AIDS Commission. “These results will provide input into the ongoing mid-term review of our National HIV and AIDS Strategic Plan”.

“We need the knowledge and experience of everything that offers us a better understanding of the epidemic so that we can act with more effectiveness and efficiency,” said Dr Joana Manguera, Chief Executive of the National AIDS Coordinating Body of Mozambique.

Based on these analyses, UNAIDS calls upon countries to adopt a new approach – combination prevention – which involves choosing the right mix of behavioural, biomedical and structural HIV prevention actions and tactics to suit a country’s actual epidemic and the needs of those most at risk, just as the right combination and proportions of drugs for antiretroviral treatment is now saving millions of lives.

“There is no single magic bullet for HIV prevention, but we can choose wisely from the known prevention options available so that they can reinforce and complement each other

and cut back the wave of ongoing new HIV infections that is stripping away gains in treatment,” said Dr Piot.

Even though the number of new HIV infections has fallen in several countries, there are five new HIV infections for every two people put on treatment. As reported earlier in 2008, some 3 million people are now receiving antiretroviral treatment in low- and middle-income countries. The global financial crisis could lead to funding cutbacks, which, in turn, will have harmful impacts throughout the developing world generally and in the AIDS response in particular.

Global facts and figures on AIDS

- An estimated 33.0 million [30.3 – 36.1 million] people living with HIV worldwide.
- 2.7 million [2.2 million to 3.2 million] people newly infected in 2007.
- 2.0 million [1.8 million – 2.3 million] people died of AIDS in 2007.

About AIDS Outlook 09

AIDS Outlook is a new report from UNAIDS that provides perspectives on some of the most pressing issues that will confront policymakers and leaders as they respond to the challenges presented by AIDS in 2009.

The report begins by highlighting some recent achievements and challenges in addressing HIV. It provides examples of how countries are applying modelling techniques to better understand HIV incidence, with the aim of reinvigorating HIV prevention. AIDS Outlook concludes with an introduction to combination HIV prevention and its application.

Contact

Mallory Smuts | +41 22 791 1697 | smutsm@unaids.org

About UNAIDS

UNAIDS is an innovative joint venture of the United Nations, bringing together the efforts and resources of the UNAIDS Secretariat and ten UN system organizations in the AIDS response. The Secretariat headquarters is in Geneva, Switzerland—with staff on the ground in more than 80 countries. Coherent action on AIDS by the UN system is coordinated in countries through UN theme groups, and joint programmes on AIDS. UNAIDS’ Cosponsors include UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank. Visit the UNAIDS Web site at www.unaids.org