

Editorial Note on HIV/AIDS: Key Facts

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Introduction

HIV stands for human immunodeficiency virus, which is the virus that causes HIV infection. The abbreviation "HIV" can refer to the virus or to HIV infection. AIDS stands for acquired immunodeficiency syndrome. AIDS is the most advanced stage of HIV infection. HIV attacks and destroys the infection-fighting CD4 cells of the immune system. The loss of CD4 cells makes it difficult for the body to fight off infections and certain cancer without treatment, HIV can gradually destroy the immune system and advance to AIDS. This article deals with the key facts related to the Disease.

HIV is the virus that causes HIV infection. AIDS is the most advanced stage of HIV infection. HIV is spread through contact with the blood, semen, pre-seminal fluid, rectal fluids, vaginal fluids, or breast milk of a person with HIV. In the United States, HIV is spread mainly by having anal or vaginal sex or sharing injection drug equipment, such as needles, with a person who has HIV. Antiretroviral therapy (ART) is the use of HIV medicines to treat HIV infection. People on ART take a combination of HIV medicines (called an HIV regimen) every day. ART is recommended for everyone who has HIV. ART can't cure HIV infection, but HIV medicines help people with HIV live longer, healthier lives. HIV medicines can also reduce the risk of HIV transmission.

Key Facts

HIV continues to be a major global public health issue, having claimed almost 33 million lives so far. However, with increasing access to effective HIV prevention, diagnosis, treatment and care, including for opportunistic infections, HIV infection has become a manageable chronic health condition, enabling people living with HIV to lead long and healthy lives.

There were an estimated 38.0 million people living with HIV at the end of 2019. As a result of concerted international efforts to respond to HIV, coverage of services has been steadily increasing. In 2019, 68% of adults and 53% of children living with HIV globally were receiving lifelong antiretroviral therapy (ART).

A great majority (85%) of pregnant and breastfeeding women living with HIV also received ART, which not only protects their health, but also ensures prevention of HIV transmission to their newborns. At the end of 2019, an estimated 81% of people living with HIV knew their status. 67% were receiving antiretroviral therapy (ART) and 59% had achieved suppression of the HIV virus with no risk of infecting others; about 30 million adolescent boys and men in East and Southern Africa had received VMMC services. By June 2020, 26 million people were accessing antiretroviral therapy, marking a 2.4% increase from an estimate of 25.4 million at the end of 2019. By comparison, treatment coverage increased by an estimated 4.8% between January and June of 2019. The number of new people starting treatment is far below expectation due to the reduction in HIV-testing and treatment initiation and ARV disruptions that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. By end 2020, testing and treatment rates showed steady but variable recovery. Nevertheless, between 2000 and 2019, new HIV infections fell by 39% and HIV-related deaths fell by 51%, with 15.3 million lives saved due to ART. This achievement was the result of great efforts by national HIV programmes supported by civil society and international development partners. But success has been variable by region, country and population; however, not everyone is able to access HIV testing, treatment and care. Notably, the 2018 Super-Fast-Track targets for reducing new paediatric HIV infections to 40 000 was not achieved. Given prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, reduction of new infections and deaths had plateaued; global 90/90/90 targets for 2020 are at risk of being missed unless rapid action is taken.

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