

Alarming AIDS: Marking World AIDS Day 2016



A Special Series Report.

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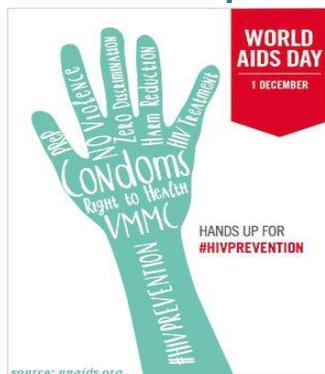
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About World AIDS Day

World AIDS Day was created by the World Health Organization and the United Nations General Assembly. World AIDS Day is celebrated every year on 1 December as an attempt to raise awareness regarding the AIDS pandemic caused by the spread of HIV infection, and as a mourning for those who have died of AIDS. Governments, organizations, health officials and individuals participate in this event as an attempt to bring forth awareness on AIDS prevention and control. World AIDS Day is one of the eight official global public health campaigns marked by the World Health Organization and has been celebrated annually since 1998.

World Health organization claims that more than **65 million people have been infected with HIV and more than 25 million people have died of HIV till date. It further forecasts that more than 117 million additional deaths will occur by 2030 because of AIDS.** World AIDS Day draws attention to the seriousness of HIV/AIDS and its impact on a global scale and has become one of the most widely recognized international health awareness campaigns.

The Hands Up for HIV Prevention Campaign



In the build-up to World AIDS day 2016, the hands up for HIV prevention campaign is exploring different aspects of HIV prevention and how they relate to specific groups of people, such as adolescent girls and young women, key populations and people living with HIV. The campaign started on September and offered people space to express their views on what they think needs to be done to strengthen HIV prevention efforts. The campaign will cover aspects of HIV prevention, such as condoms and lubricants, harm reduction, PrEP, voluntary medical male circumcision, prevention of mother to child transmission of HIV, testing and viral suppression. It will explore how to address the barriers that prevent adolescent girls and young women, key populations and people living with HIV from accessing and using these services.

UNAIDS is asking people from around the world to submit;

- A photograph of a word or short phrase written on the palm of their hand summarizing what we need to strengthen HIV prevention efforts, for example more condoms, empowerment, inclusion, women rights etc.

And/or

- A short video message explaining what in their view needs to be done to reduce new HIV infections in their community.

Why is World AIDS Day Important?

One of the biggest problem people face with HIV is the attitudes of others. HIV stigma not only affects the victims but also their family and loved ones. World AIDS day provides a platform to show solidarity and support the 36 million people who are victims of AIDS.

World AIDS day is an opportunity for people worldwide to unite in the fight against HIV and raise awareness of the continuing epidemic around the globe. It is an occasion to reflect about more 25 million people who have died of HIV/AIDS over the past decade, to consider how to better care for the 36 million people living with HIV/AIDS, and to reach out to families, friends and loved ones who have been deeply affected.

Today, scientific advances have been made in HIV treatment and there are laws to protect people living with HIV. Despite this many people who are diagnosed with HIV, do not know the facts about how to protect themselves and others, and stigma and discrimination remain a reality for many people living with the condition. World AIDS Day is important because it reminds us and the government that HIV is still persistent and has not gone away and there is still a vital need to raise money, increase awareness, fight prejudice and improve education.

Previous World AIDS Day Themes

Below mentioned are some previous World AIDS Day Themes;¹

Year	Themes
2015	On the fast track to end AIDS
2014	Close the gap
2013	Zero Discrimination
2012	Together we will end AIDS
2011	Getting to Zero
2010	Universal Access and Human Rights
2009	Universal Access and Human Rights
2008	Stop AIDS. Keep the Promise-Lead-Empower-Deliver
2007	Stop AIDS. Keep the Promise- Leadership
2006	Stop AIDS. Keep the Promise- Accountability
2005	Stop AIDS. Keep the Promise
2004	Women, Girls, HIV and AIDS
2003	Stigma and Discrimination
2002	Stigma and Discrimination
2001	I care. Do You?
2000	AIDS: Men Make a Difference

¹ World AIDS Day 2015: Getting to Zero, Minnesota Department of Health
<http://www.health.state.mn.us/divs/idepc/diseases/hiv/worldaidsday/index.html>

What is done on AIDS Day?

Each year, government agencies and independent nonprofit organizations join together to strengthen international efforts that address the worldwide AIDS pandemic. World AIDS Day programming typically focuses on Activism, Education, Fundraising and Memorial ceremonies in order to raise public awareness of, and engagement with, the problems of HIV/AIDS globally.

Various initiatives and campaigns are carried out to mark World Aids Day such as;

1. Wearing a red ribbon to show support and solidarity to the millions of people living with HIV.
2. Fundraising events like bake sales, dinner parties and selling ribbons can be hosted for helping the people living with HIV and raising HIV awareness.
3. Sharing and re-tweeting messages over the social networking sites.
4. Conduct candlelight memorial ceremonies to remember those who have died of AIDS.
5. Organize workshops, seminars, public presentations, panel discussions, health fairs and public service announcements and advertisement.
6. Events like art exhibitions, fashion shows, musical performances, theater performances, dances, sporting events, film screening, and private parties can be conducted.
7. Activities such as letter writing and phone banks can be held, directed towards politicians and members of media as outreach programs.

About HIV and AIDS

HIV is a virus that gradually attacks the immune system, which is our body's natural defense against illness. If a person becomes infected with HIV, they will find it hard to fight off infections and diseases. The virus destroys a type of white blood cell called a CD4 cell and makes copies of itself inside them. If left untreated, it can take around 10-15 years for AIDS to develop, which is when HIV has severely damaged the immune system. With early diagnosis and effective ART, people with HIV can live a normal, healthy life.²

Meanwhile, AIDS is a syndrome caused by the HIV virus. It is when a person's immune system is too weak to fight off many infections, and develops when the HIV infection is very advanced. This is the last stage of HIV infection where the body can no longer defend itself and may develop various diseases and infections which if left untreated results in death. Someone with AIDS may develop a wide range of other health conditions like pneumonia, thrush, fungal infections and TB. There is also an increased risk of developing other life-limiting conditions, including cancer and brain illness.³

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Saving Lives/Protecting People, HIV/AIDS
<http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/whatishiv.html>

³ What is AIDS? The AIDS Infonet, Reliable, Up-to-Data Treatment Information
http://www.aidsinonet.org/fact_sheets/view/101

Transmission of AIDS

HIV can be transmitted via the exchange of a variety of body fluids from infected individuals, such as blood, breast milk, and semen/vagina secretions. However it has to be understood that individuals cannot be infected through ordinary day-to-day contact such as kissing, hugging, shaking hands, or sharing personal objects, food or water.

Risk Factors involved with HIV/AIDS

Behaviors and conditions that put individuals at greater risk of getting HIV includes;

- Having unprotected sex
- Having another sexually transmitted infections such as syphilis, herpes, chlamydia, and gonorrhea
- Sharing contaminated needles, syringes and other injecting equipment and drug solutions when injecting drugs
- Receiving unsafe injections, blood transfusions, medical procedures that involve unsterile cutting or piercing, and
- Experiencing accidental needle stick injuries, including among health workers.

The Global Picture

HIV continues to be a major global public health issue, having claimed more than 35 million lives so far. In 2016, 36.7 million people are living with HIV and only 18.2 million people have access to ART. In 2015, an approximate of 1.1 million people had died from HIV related causes. There were approximately 36.7 million people living with HIV at the end of 2015 and about 2.1 million new people are being infected every year by HIV. Sub-Saharan Africa is the most affected region with about 25.6 million people living with HIV in 2015 and it also accounts for the two-third of global total of new HIV infections. ⁴

It is estimated that globally only 54% of people living with HIV know their status. In 2014, approximately 150 million children and adults in 129 low and middle income countries received HIV testing services. Between 2000 and 2015, new HIV infections have fallen by 35%, AIDS-related deaths have fallen by 28% and about 7.8 million lives have been saved as a result of international efforts. As of June 2016, an average of 18.2 million people living with HIV has access to ART, which has went up from 15.8 million in 2015 and 7.5 million in 2010. It is further estimated that expanding ART to all people living with HIV and expanding the prevention choices can help avert 21 million AIDS-related deaths and 28 million new infections by 2030.⁵

⁴ Global HIV Statistics, UNAIDS, Fact Sheet November 2016

http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/UNAIDS_FactSheet_en.pdf

⁵ HIV/AIDS Factsheet, 2016, World Health Organization

<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs360/en/>

In 2015, a total of 19 billion US\$ had been invested in response to AIDS in low-and-middle-income countries. USAIDS estimates that a sum of 26.2 billion US\$ will be required for AIDS response in 2020 and a sum of 23.9 billion will be required in 2030.⁶

AIDS in Asia and Pacific Region

Asia Pacific is a wide and varied region, containing more than half of the world's population. Throughout the region there has been mixed progress in reducing new HIV infections and AIDS related deaths with variations in HIV prevalence among key populations.

In 2016, approximately 5.1 million people are living with HIV with 300,000 new HIV infections and 180,000 AIDS related deaths each year. There were 19,000 new HIV infections among children in 2015. China, India and Indonesia account for about ¾ of the total number of people living with HIV in the region. The period 2010-2015 saw an overall decline of 5% in new infections and a decline of 24% in AIDS related deaths. The coverage rate was 41% among the people living with HIV in the region and an estimated 3 million adults did not have access to ART in 2015.⁷

HIV and Mental Health

Mental health refers to the overall well-being of a person, including a person's mood, emotions and behavior. Anyone can have mental health problems and are fairly common in many countries in the world. However, among people living with HIV, the rates of mental health conditions are higher than among general public. People with HIV may experience depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, suicidal thoughts, and insomnia. People living with HIV may experience stigma and discrimination from other people with negative views on HIV.⁸

Sometimes, HIV and related infections can directly impact the brain and nervous system. This may lead to problems in memory, thinking, and behaviour. Furthermore, some medicines used to treat HIV may have side effects that affect a person's mental health. Thus HIV victims have to take care of both, their mental and physical health. And it has to be kept in mind that mental health conditions are treatable and that people who have mental health problems can recover if timely and proper treatment is sought.

⁶ Global HIV Statistics, UNAIDS, Fact Sheet November 2016
http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/UNAIDS_FactSheet_en.pdf

⁷ Factsheet November 2016, UNAIDS, HIV Statistics
http://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/UNAIDS_FactSheet_en.pdf

⁸ HIV, Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing, Aidsmap, Roger Pebody, Michael Cater
<http://www.aidsmap.com/HIV-mental-health-emotional-wellbeing/page/1321435/>

AIDS in Nepal

The first case of HIV infection in Nepal was identified in 1998. Since then Nepal has shown to make substantial progress in HIV and AIDS, nevertheless the problem of HIV is long from being over. The prevalence of HIV among adult population has been declining steadily however, Nepal has made drastic progress in reduction of new HIV infections. **The number of new HIV infections declined from 7512 in 2000 to 1331 in 2015.**⁹

AIDS is mostly concentrated among the vulnerable population in Nepal which involves sex workers, injecting drug users, homosexuals and migrants. Nepal's poverty, political instability and gender inequality, combined with low levels of education and literacy makes the task challenging along with the denial, stigma and discrimination that surrounds HIV and AIDS.

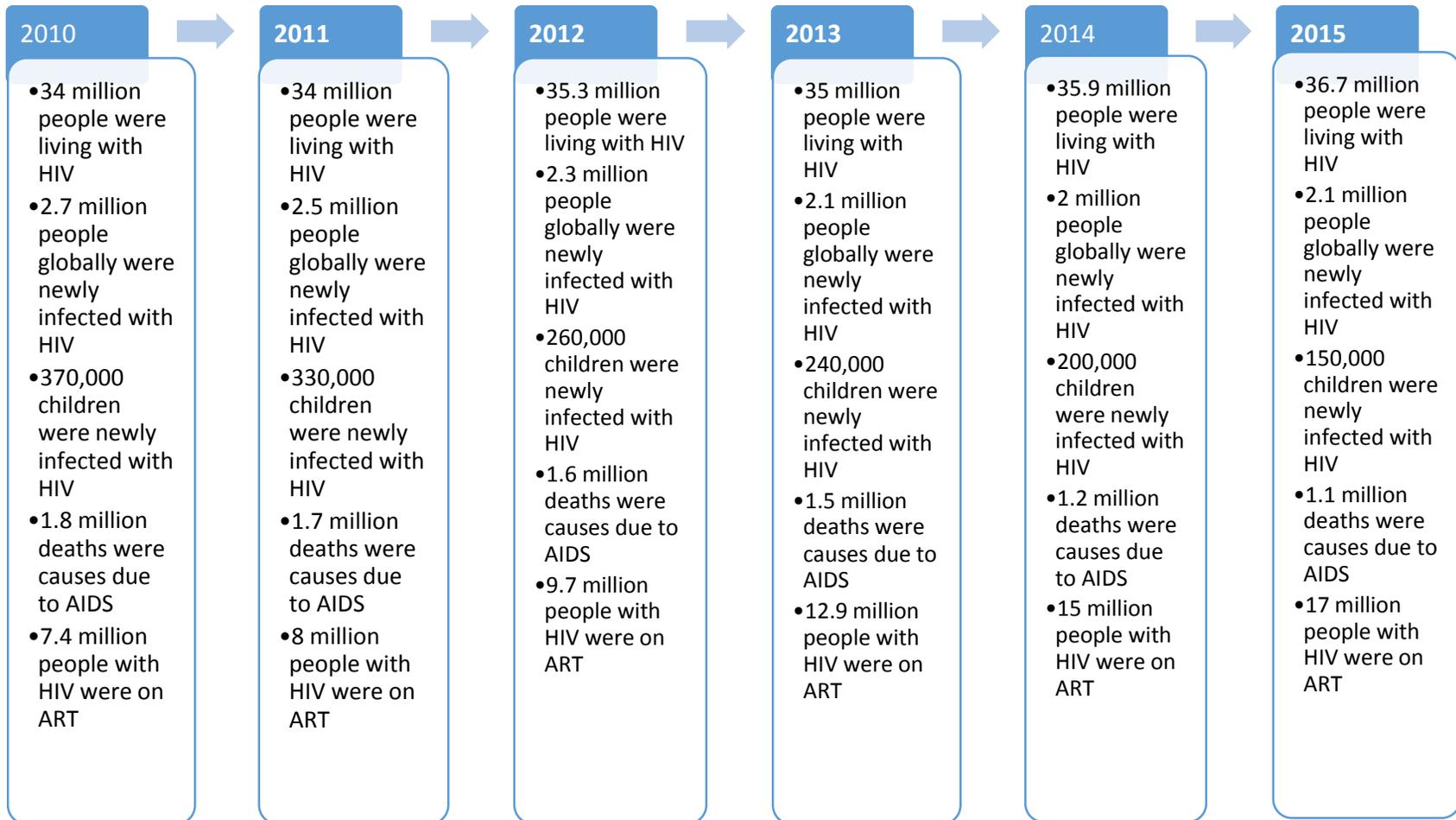
In 2016 a total of 28,865 cases (Male-17949, Female-10824 and Trans-Gender-92) of HIV AIDS were reported in Nepal. This figure mostly involved sex workers, drug addicts, homosexuals, clients of sex workers, migrants and their spouse. The highest infection rates were found among the age group of 25-49 with over 21026 people infected.¹⁰ Over the past few years the National Center for AIDS and STD Control in Nepal has scaled up HIV related services in many districts of Nepal. In 2015, Nepal had 263 HIV testing and counselling (HTC) and, Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI) management service sites across 75 districts.

Lack of governance and coordination among the stakeholders along with relative low coverage of services, scarcity of trained human resources and prevalent inequalities are some key challenges for Nepal. Additional efforts in scaling up of HIV related services, effective decentralization of HIV training and counselling, better clinical management and strategic activities are required to tackle the existing problem of HIV AIDS in Nepal.

⁹ National Center for AIDS and STD Control, Government of Nepal, Ministry of Health
<http://www.ncasc.gov.np>

¹⁰ Cumulative HIV Cases in Nepal, 2016, Government of Nepal Ministry of Health, National Center for AIDS and STD Control
<http://www.ncasc.gov.np/index1.php>

STAGGERING STATISTICS ON HIV and AIDS from 2010 to 2015



The Way Forward

Understanding of the causes and consequences of HIV/AIDS has grown enormously. HIV/AIDS has now been an issue of international attention and much has been learned about what is needed to prevent and respond to HIV infection. Despite the substantial fall in HIV prevalence in many countries, the HIV pandemic continues to be one of the biggest threats to the global health. There are still important milestones to reach, barriers to break and frontiers to cross before the epidemic is put to a halt. HIV/AIDS has become more complex and is not just a health crisis but a social and development crisis.

Getting the support of political leaders, religious leaders and other influential figures in society can help to raise awareness and influence norms regarding HIV prevention. Use of ART represents a drastic achievement in HIV/AIDS control and has given hope to millions of HIV-infected individuals. Obstacles to effective HIV control include lack of prevention and care coverage.

The world is embarking on a Fast-Track strategy to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030. To reach this visionary goal after three decades of most severe epidemic in history, countries will need to use the most powerful and appropriate tools available and should be accountable for the results of each other making sure that no one is left behind.

