

HIV/AIDS in southern Africa: A briefing from ACTSA on World AIDS Day 2010

Southern Africa has been worse hit by HIV/AIDS than any other part of the world. 1 in 3 people who are HIV positive live in southern Africa and 9 of the 10 countries with the worst HIV/AIDS prevalence can be found in the region. The only countries with HIV rates above 10 per cent are all in southern Africa.

This briefing looks at the progress made in the fight to tackle the pandemic and the ongoing challenges across the region. Progress has been made in the fight against AIDS but there is still a long way to go. Although the pandemic has plateaued, it has done so at extraordinarily high levels and continues to have a major impact on every person, family, community and state in the region.

In all of the countries in this update the rate of new infections has fallen from its peak, however there are differences in how fast and consistently it has fallen. Whereas new incidences of infection have been cut dramatically in Namibia and Botswana (where they are down to similar levels or lower than in 1990) in Lesotho and Zambia they have flattened out and have not fallen by much in the last few years.

Across southern Africa HIV/AIDS rates are significantly higher among women than men. For example, in Botswana the HIV prevalence rate for women is 20.4 per cent compared to 14.2 per cent for men. Women are also less likely to know their status: in Malawi only 3.6 per cent of women aged 15-49 received an HIV test in 2009 and knew the result, compared to 7.7 per cent of men.

A clear trend is the link between the number of pregnant HIV-positive women receiving anti-retroviral treatment and the number of infants born infected with HIV. As the case of Botswana shows, even in a country with an extremely high prevalence rate, mother-to-child transmission¹ can be brought to very low levels

Country profiles

Swaziland

Swaziland remains the country with the highest HIV prevalence rate in the world, standing at 26.10 per cent in 2009. Almost a third of women aged 15 to 49 are known to have HIV. 59 per cent of people requiring anti-retroviral treatment receive it.

There has been some progress in tackling mother-to-child transmission, with an increase in the number of women who need it receiving anti-retroviral treatment to help prevent mother-to-child transmission. It has been estimated

¹ Some object to the terminology mother to child transmission as it could stigmatise women. Some use vertical transmission or parent to child transmission

that in 2009 16.9 per cent of infants born to HIV positive mothers would themselves be HIV positive.

Botswana

Botswana has, along with Swaziland and Lesotho, a very high prevalence rate, standing at 23.9 per cent. 83 per cent of people requiring anti-retroviral treatment receive it.

Most HIV-positive women receive anti-retroviral treatment during pregnancy which means that only 3.8 per cent of infants born to HIV-positive mothers are estimated to be infected, much lower than in Swaziland and Lesotho and showing that it is possible to virtually eliminate mother-to-child transmission by 2015.

Lesotho

The prevalence rate of HIV infections is 23.2 per cent. 48 per cent of people requiring anti-retroviral treatment receive it.

There has not been any significant decline in the rate of new infections since 2001, with the incidence rate standing at around half its peak.

A prevention of mother-to-child transmission programme was started in 2003 and has been significantly scaled up since 2005 with 71 per cent of HIV-positive pregnant women receiving anti-retroviral treatment. The last estimate, from 2007, for infants of HIV-positive mothers being born with HIV infections was 15 per cent.

Lesotho has good coverage for detecting co-infections of TB and HIV with 78 per cent of individuals diagnosed with TB also being tested for HIV.

South Africa

The prevalence rate for HIV infections is 18.1 per cent.

South Africa has more people living HIV/AIDS than any other country in the world, 5.7 million in 2009. 37 per cent of people requiring anti-retroviral treatment receive it.

The incidence rate is steadily declining.

South Africa, after years of controversy, now has an HIV/AIDS policy and strategy which has been broadly accepted at government and non government level. The challenge is ensuring positive policy translates into positive action on the ground. A new package of measures was announced in 2009. A nationwide testing and counselling campaign started in April 2010. The aim is to test 15 million people by the end of 2011.

While over 95 per cent of public sector antenatal service sites provided prevention of mother-to-child transmission services the estimate for pregnant HIV positive women receiving anti-retroviral treatment fell to 83 per cent in 2009 from 86 per cent in 2008.

Namibia

The prevalence rate for HIV infection is 15.3 per cent and 76 per cent of people requiring anti-retroviral treatment receive it.

58 per cent of pregnant women with HIV receive anti-retroviral treatment and 12.7 per cent of infants born to HIV positive mothers are estimated to have HIV. Women who are identified as HIV positive during antenatal care or delivery are much more likely to receive antiretroviral treatment with 90 per cent of women in this category receiving anti-retroviral prophylaxis.

Namibia has had particular success in lowering the number of new infections each year and the incidence rate now stands lower than it did in 1990.

Zimbabwe

The HIV prevalence rate is 15.3 per cent. 34 per cent of people requiring anti-retroviral treatment receive it.

There is currently no national prevention strategy, however Zimbabwe has seen one of the greatest falls in new infections of HIV, with the incidence rate falling from almost 6 per cent at its peak to around 1 per cent in 2009 and still falling. Some have queried these figures.

In 2008 42.6 per cent of HIV positive pregnant women received anti-retrovirals to reduce the risk of mother-to-child-transmission and 30 per cent of infants born to mothers with HIV were infected. Before the political and economic crisis in 2008 Zimbabwe was seen as having a very strong response on preventing mother-to-child transmission.

Detection of Tuberculosis and testing TB patients for HIV is a significant weak point. The TB detection rate is less than 40 per cent and it is estimated that 70 per cent of TB sufferers are also infected with HIV, meaning that many HIV infections are missed.

Zambia

The prevalence rate of HIV infection is 15.2 per cent and 64 per cent of people requiring anti-retroviral treatment receive it.

In 2009 60.9 per cent of HIV positive pregnant women received anti-retroviral treatment and 6.8 per cent of infants born to HIV positive mothers were infected with HIV.

Although the incidence rate of new infections fell year-on-year between 2003 and 2007 since then it has remained largely the same.

Mozambique

The prevalence rate of HIV infections is 12.5 per cent.

As recently as 2003 Mozambique had very little access to anti-retroviral treatment with only 3,314 people receiving treatment. In 2009 there were 170,198 people actively on anti-retroviral treatment. 30 per cent of people

requiring treatment receive it. While this represents a significant scale-up, Mozambique has the lowest access to anti-retroviral treatment in the region.

New infections of HIV peaked in 2001 in Mozambique, quite late in comparison to many southern African countries, and so far have only fallen by about a third.

45.8 per cent of pregnant HIV positive women receive anti-retroviral treatment. This has increased since a major scale up in preventing mother to child transmission services in antenatal clinics. This means that almost half of all pregnant women receive counselling and testing for HIV. In 2009 29 per cent of infants born to HIV positive mothers were born with HIV infections.

Malawi

The prevalence rate for HIV infections is 11.9 per cent and 46 per cent of people requiring anti-retroviral treatment receive it.

The rate of new infections had been falling steadily since peaking in the early nineties.

Of the countries covered here Malawi has the lowest number of pregnant HIV-positive women receiving anti-retroviral treatment, with only 38.8 per cent of them receiving treatment in 2009. However, there has been a big scale-up of sites providing prevention of mother-to-child transmission services and the 2010 target is for 65 per cent of women concerned to receive anti-retroviral treatment.

Appendix

	COUNTRY	HIV Prevalence Rate	Numbers Living with HIV	Number of Women (+15) living with HIV	Number of Orphans (0-17) due to AIDS	% of those who should receive ARV Treatment who receive it
1	Swaziland	26.10%	190,000	100,000	56,000	59%
2	Botswana	23.90%	300,000	170,000	95,000	83%
3	Lesotho	23.20%	270,000	150,000	110,000	48%
4	South Africa	18.10%	5,700,000	3,200,000	1,400,000	37%
5	Namibia	15.30%	200,000	110,000	66,000	76%
6	Zimbabwe	15.30%	1,300,000	680,000	140,000	34%
7	Zambia	15.20%	1,100,000	560,000	600,000	64%
8	Mozambique	12.50%	1,500,000	810,000	81,000	30%
9	Malawi	11.90%	930,000	490,000	560,000	46%

