

HIV and AIDS

What is HIV and what is AIDS?

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. It infects cells in the body that protect a person from getting sick, making it difficult to fight off diseases. There are no clear symptoms of HIV infection.

AIDS is the final stage of HIV infection. Not everyone with HIV gets to this stage. When the body can no longer defend itself, a person may get one or more serious diseases like pneumonia or tuberculosis.

HIV = Human Immunodeficiency Virus. AIDS = Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

HIV and AIDS: a development issue

HIV and AIDS isn't just a health issue, it holds back human development. It has a huge impact in low and middle income countries where 95% of all people with HIV and AIDS live. HIV can harm the economic development of a whole country, for example when people are too ill to work, or too busy caring for sick relatives.

- › 940,000 people died of AIDS-related diseases in 2017.
- › Nearly 37 million people worldwide are living with HIV and AIDS (2017). The lives of their family members and friends are also affected. (Data: UNAIDS)

There are many factors that make poorer countries more vulnerable to the spread and impact of HIV. See 'Root Causes' overleaf.

TRY THIS Watch the 'HIV animation' on CAFOD's website and draw the problem tree. Discuss the root causes. (Search for 'HIV animation' at cafod.org.uk)

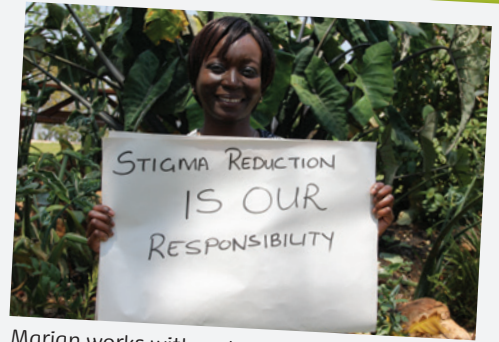
Progress and the future

- › Between 2000 and 2017, new HIV infections among children aged 0-9 dropped by 58%. (UNICEF)
- › By 2017 the number of people getting access to treatment had doubled in five years, to 21.7 million. (UNAIDS 2017)
- › Incredible milestones are within reach – such as preventing children from being born with HIV.

However, AIDS is not over. A quarter of the people with the virus do not know they have it, and in some parts of the world like Eastern Europe, new infections are on the rise. There's still a long way to go.

FACT

3 MILLION CHILDREN ARE NOW LIVING WITH HIV AND AIDS. UNICEF 2017



Marian works with us to reduce the stigma associated with HIV and AIDS in Zimbabwe.

Infection and treatment

HIV is passed on when blood, sexual fluids or breast milk from someone infected with HIV get inside an uninfected person. This can happen during:

- › unprotected sex;
- › pregnancy, childbirth and breast-feeding if the mother has the virus;
- › sharing of drug-injecting equipment;
- › blood transmission from an HIV-infected donor or use of medical equipment which is not properly clean.

NB In a developed country like the UK, the risk of becoming infected through donor blood or unclean medical equipment is almost zero.

FACT

AIDS-RELATED DEATHS HAVE FALLEN BY HALF SINCE THE 2004 PEAK (UNAIDS 2017)

There is no cure for HIV but there have been huge advances using drugs called antiretrovirals (ARVs), which can slow down HIV infection, and greatly increase life expectancy and quality of life. Efforts are focused on getting everyone infected onto these. A vaccine for HIV is still a long way off.

When people living with HIV take their treatment as prescribed, they can live almost as long as someone without HIV. Also, many AIDS-related illnesses can be treated successfully.



Root causes: why poor countries are hit hardest

Poverty

Poverty is at the root of the spread of HIV in developing countries. It makes people more vulnerable in many ways. Lack of education leads to ignorance about the causes of HIV and AIDS. Not having enough cash to access healthcare can mean people don't get tested – or treated. If you don't eat well, HIV medication doesn't work so effectively.

Conflict and emergencies

The spread of HIV increases in situations of war or natural disasters, when normal healthcare is disrupted by chaos.

Stigma

Cultural attitudes or ignorance can make it hard for people to talk about HIV and AIDS. People with HIV may be rejected by their communities and lose their jobs and homes. Children orphaned by AIDS are often outcast. Discrimination and human rights violations are widespread. 1 in 8 people with HIV report being denied access to healthcare (OHCHR). All of this increases the risk of the virus spreading. Principles of non-discrimination, equality, access to justice and accountability are crucial if the AIDS response is to be effective.

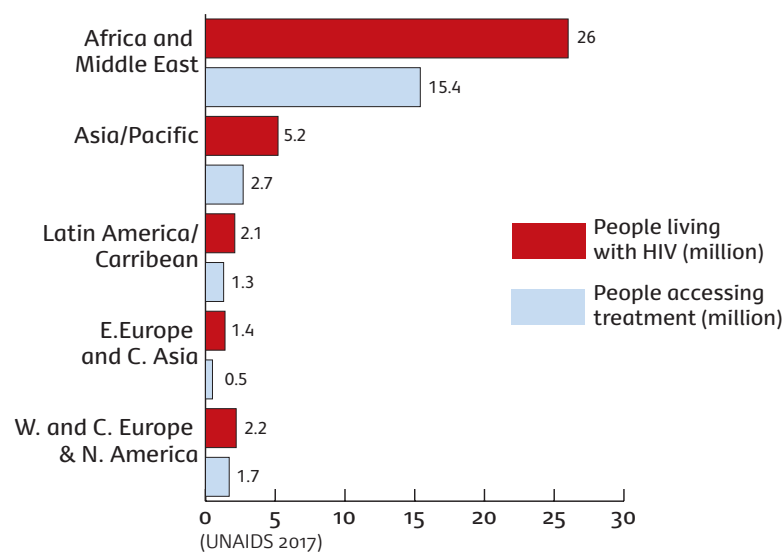
Access to treatment

People in developing countries often have more difficulty getting treatment for HIV than people in wealthier countries. ARVs are offered for free in many places, but even then people may not have money to travel to clinics. Distribution and availability can also be problematic, so people can't stick to their medication regime.

Gender inequality

HIV is the leading cause of death for women of reproductive age. The unequal status of women in many poor countries makes them especially vulnerable. Women, especially women with HIV, suffer more stigma, discrimination and violence than men. They may be raped, or not have the power to refuse unsafe sex with an infected partner. Women may be denied access to health services.

HIV: Who is getting treatment?



What is CAFOD doing?

FACT

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH IS THE SINGLE BIGGEST PROVIDER OF CARE FOR PEOPLE AFFECTED BY HIV AND AIDS WORLDWIDE, THROUGH ITS NETWORKS AND AGENCIES LIKE CAFOD.

We work with partner organisations to address the causes and impacts of HIV and AIDS. Prevention is critical, so we work to ensure people know what HIV is and how to protect themselves. We believe all-round support is needed for people living with HIV, for example:

- > Healthcare, including psychological support.
- > Help in getting back to work.
- > Getting enough to eat.
- > Help with legal issues.

In **Honduras**, CAFOD-supported project Puerta Abierta (Open Door) provides all-round care at home for people with HIV and their families. A team which includes people living with HIV offers medical, material and spiritual help.

In **Zimbabwe**, the Putting Children First programme helps children living with or affected by HIV to stand up for their rights. Children lead clubs which explore trauma, stigma or legal rights through songs and drama.



TRY THIS

Write an assembly on HIV and AIDS around the world, perhaps for World AIDS day, 1 December.

Useful websites



cafod.org.uk

Search 'HIV animation'

unaids.org

UN data on HIV and AIDS in all countries

stopaids.org.uk

80 UK agencies including CAFOD working on global response to HIV and AIDS

CAFOD is not responsible for the content of external websites.

TRY THIS

List the reasons why someone living with HIV in a developing country might find it more difficult to survive than someone in a wealthy country.