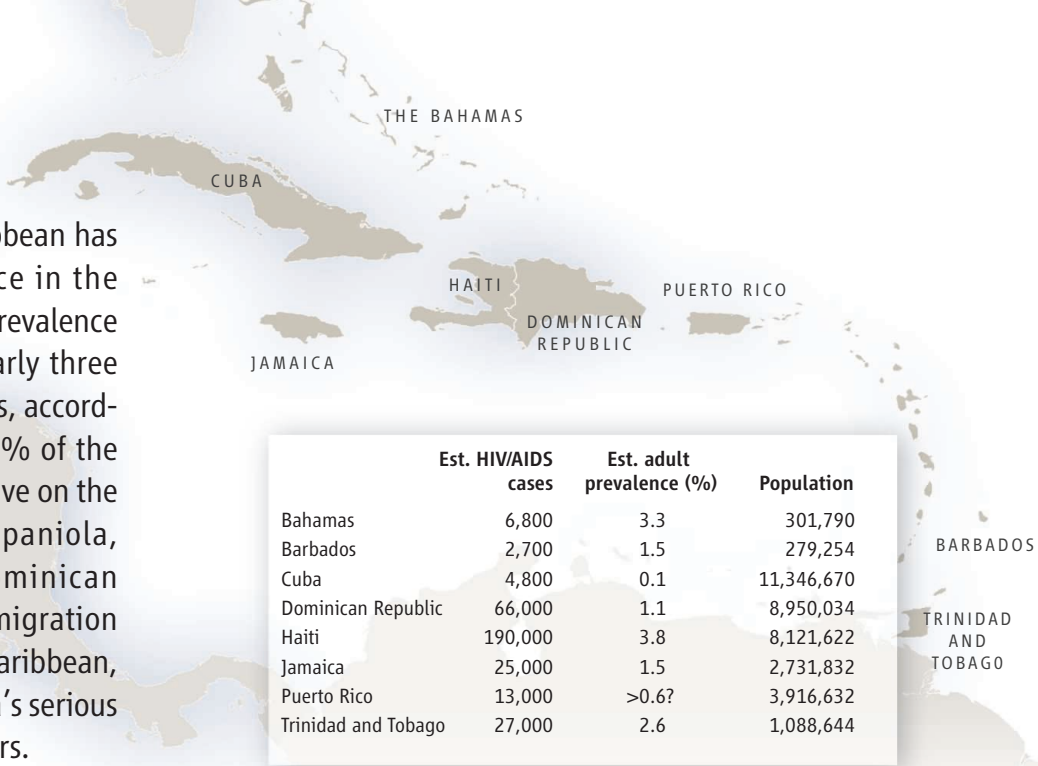


# The Caribbean

After sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean has the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence in the world. At the end of 2005, adult prevalence in the Caribbean was 1.6%—nearly three times higher than the United States, according to U.N. figures. More than 85% of the HIV-infected people in the region live on the heavily populated island of Hispaniola, home to both Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Heterosexual sex and migration drive the spread throughout the Caribbean, save for Puerto Rico's and Bermuda's serious HIV problems in injecting drug users.



## HAITI

# Making Headway Under Hellacious Circumstances

This impoverished, conflict-ridden country is staging a feisty battle against HIV

PORT-AU-PRINCE, CANGE, AND CHAMBO, HAITI—Banners hang across the main thoroughfares in Port-au-Prince urging residents to report kidnappings. Blue-helmeted U.N. troops patrol the city in armored personnel carriers. The slums that border the once-elegant downtown have names like Cité Soliel and Bel Air that seem to mock their poverty and violence.

At an AIDS clinic called GHESKIO that sits at the edge of two of these slums, Cité L'Eternel and Cité de Dieu, the staff jokingly refers to the neighborhood as Kosovo. But the mood at GHESKIO (pronounced "jess-key-oh") is anything but hostile. The guards at the gates have no weapons, and as GHESKIO's founder and leader Jean "Bill" Pape likes to boast, "we have not lost one pencil" in the more than 20 years the clinic has operated there.

Pape climbs the stairs of the main clinic and enters the waiting room. About 100 patients, many spiffily dressed, sit in neat rows.

"*Bonjour,*" says Pape.

"*Bonjour!*" the patients reply in unison.

Improbable as it seems, today is a good day for many of the people here, who receive anti-retroviral drugs and state-of-the-art care they otherwise couldn't afford. It's also in many ways a good moment in the HIV/AIDS struggle in the

country at large. The poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, Haiti has more HIV/AIDS patients per capita than any locale outside sub-Saharan Africa. Yet HIV-infected people here often receive better care than many in the Caribbean and Latin America, thanks largely to GHESKIO and another widely celebrated program, Zanmi Lasante—Creole for "Partners in Health"—started by medical anthropologist Paul Farmer of Harvard Medical School in Boston. And recently, encouraging signs have emerged that the epidemic in Haiti is shrinking.

Then again, combating HIV/AIDS in Haiti, where the ever-changing and crisis-plagued government has largely handed off its responsibilities to GHESKIO and Zanmi Lasante, remains an uphill battle. And it's a steep hill.

### 4H club

In 1982, a year after AIDS had first been diagnosed but not yet named in a cluster of homosexual American men in Los Angeles, the U.S. Centers

for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta, Georgia, reported that a group of recent immigrants from Haiti had the strange opportunistic infections and immune problems that characterized the disease. Fears rose with reports of similar immune deficiencies among Haitians who still lived in that country. Soon, the mysterious ailment was being referred to as "the 4H disease," as it seemed to single out Haitians, homosexuals, hemophiliacs, and heroin users. "It was a disaster," says Pape, who at the time ran a rehydration clinic for children in conjunction with colleagues from Weill Medical College of Cornell University in New York City. "The tourism industry died. Nobody



**Political outsider.** GHESKIO's founder Jean "Bill" Pape strives to remain independent from the country's revolving door of political leaders. He says that has been a secret to GHESKIO's success.

TABLE SOURCE: UNAIDS/UNAIDS/UNAIDS WORLD FACT BOOK