

Revised HIV/AIDS Estimates for the Western Pacific Region

Overview

The Western Pacific Regional Office works together with Member States to produce HIV/AIDS estimates on a regular basis. The previous estimates were released in 1997, and were based on 1996 data. WPRO has now produced updated HIV and AIDS estimates, based on 1998 data. These new estimates are given below (Table 1).

It is estimated that more than 700 000 individuals in the Region were living with HIV in 1998. This includes more than 18 000 new cases of AIDS in 1998.

Reviewing HIV prevalence in the Region, four patterns are apparent:

- countries with declining HIV prevalence (Australia, New Zealand);
- countries with high HIV prevalence among Injecting Drug Users (China, Malaysia, Viet Nam);
- countries with increasing HIV prevalence due to heterosexual HIV transmission (Cambodia, Papua New Guinea); and
- countries with limited HIV transmission (all other countries).

It is useful to compare the current and previous estimates. In 1997, WHO projected that HIV prevalence would be close to 1 million in 1998 and AIDS incidence would be around 25 000. These projections are significantly higher than the current estimates for 1998, which were 770 000 for HIV prevalence and 18 000 for AIDS incidence in the Western Pacific Region.

Estimates were revised downward in China, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Viet Nam and upward in Cambodia.

These revisions are due to a number of developments. Since 1997, surveillance systems have improved, resulting in better data, and more accurate estimates. Also, analysis of the current data suggests that HIV is not being transmitted as rapidly in most of the Region as previously expected. This is likely to be due to current behavioural patterns and prevention and control efforts.

Although the overall estimates made in 1997 appear to have been too high, these estimates were still useful in planning public health action to respond to HIV epidemics. The revision of these estimates and projections using new data is an important part of a good epidemiological surveillance system.

Country Analysis

AIDS incidence has decreased by half in **Australia** and by 64% in **New Zealand** from 1997 to 1998. These declines are due to: (i) the introduction of highly active antiretroviral therapy for AIDS patients; and (ii) a stabilized level of infections among men who have sex with men. The 1998 data confirms declining HIV epidemics in these countries.

Cambodia has the most serious HIV epidemic in the Region, with the highest HIV prevalence rate in Asia. In 1998, 3.7% of the sexually active population (those aged 15-49) were estimated to be HIV positive, which was overwhelmingly due to

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heterosexual HIV transmission. In 1998, up to 64% of female sex workers in one location were HIV positive (national average of 42%), while HIV prevalence among women attending antenatal health services was up to 6% (on average 2.4%).

HIV transmission in **China and Viet Nam** is mostly due to the continuing spread of HIV among intravenous drug users (IDUs). About two-thirds of all reported HIV infections in each country are among IDUs, the majority of which are localized to specific geographical areas. Extensive spread of HIV among IDUs in China probably began in the early 1990s, and more than half of arrested IDUs in some areas are HIV positive.

Where there is considerable overlap between injecting drug use and sex work, there is the possibility

of larger HIV transmission through sex. These behavioural patterns are not well known in either Viet Nam, or in China. However, HIV prevalence in Viet Nam among female sex workers, and other women (for example, women attending antenatal health services) appears to be increasing. This is especially true in southern Viet Nam.

As in Viet Nam, IDUs account for about two-thirds of reported HIV infections in **Malaysia**. HIV prevalence rates among IDUs continue to average about 15% to 20% of arrested drug users (with wide variations between different places). The HIV epidemic appears to be stabilizing in Malaysia.

In **Papua New Guinea**, surveillance studies are showing a rapid increase in HIV prevalence.

In all other countries in the region, existing data show low HIV prevalence rates.

Table 1. HIV and AIDS Estimates for the Western Pacific Region, 1998

Country/ Area	Estimated HIV prevalence (age 15-49)	Estimated HIV prevalence rate (age 15-49)	Estimated AIDS incidence	Status of Epidemic
Cambodia	180 000	3.70%	6 000	expanding; heterosexual
Malaysia	45 000	0.35%	1 250	stable; mostly IDU
Viet Nam	80 000	0.20%	2 650	expanding; IDU, heterosexual transmission beginning
Papua New Guinea	4 400	0.19%	420	expanding; heterosexual transmission
Singapore	3 800	0.18%	138	stable
Australia	10 800	0.11%	500	declining; mostly homosexual
China	400 000	<0.1%	6 000	expanding; mostly IDU
Hong Kong	3 400	<0.1%	178	stable
Japan	7 300	<0.1%	300	stable
Lao, PDR	1 200	<0.1%	80	stable
New Zealand	1 200	<0.1%	35	declining; mostly homosexual
Philippines	29 000	<0.1%	650	Slow expansion; heterosexual
Korea, Republic of	3 400	<0.1%	160	stable
Total	769 500		18 361	