

REPUBLIC OF KOREA

Summary

The Republic of Korea has a low HIV prevalence rate. By the end of June 1999, a cumulative total of 964 HIV cases including 145 AIDS cases had been reported. An estimated 3400 HIV-infected individuals were living in the country in 1998 (prevalence of <0.1% among people aged 15 to 49 years). The great majority (93%) of HIV infections are estimated to be sexually transmitted, with 13% occurring among women. National seroprevalence surveys have identified only sporadic cases of HIV infection.

The seroprevalence of syphilis is also very low (0.07% among blood donors). Gonococcal antimicrobial resistance is high; in 1997, penicillin resistance was 91% and quinolone resistance 20%. Behavioural surveys in 1996 found that 48% of SWs reported using condoms during all sexual contacts .

Surveillance Structure

- The European AIDS Case definition (1993) is used.
- All HIV infection and AIDS cases are notifiable to the Ministry of Health
- Other reportable STI are syphilis, gonorrhoea, non-gonococcal urethritis, chancroid, granuloma inguinale, and lymphogranuloma venereum.

HIV/AIDS

Reported cases as of June 1999 The first case of HIV infection was reported in the Republic of Korea in 1985 and the first AIDS case in 1987. Reported cases of HIV/AIDS have gradually increased (Table 1). By the end of June 1999, a total of 964 HIV infections, including 145 AIDS cases, had been reported.

Table 1: Reported cases of HIV/AIDS by year of diagnosis in the Republic of Korea as of June 1999

	<1990	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	Total
AIDS	5	2	1	2	6	11	14	22	33	35	14	145
HIV/AIDS	73	54	42	76	78	90	108	102	124	129	88	964

The majority of reported HIV/AIDS cases have occurred among males (87% for HIV, 91% for AIDS) and heterosexuals (62% for HIV and 74% for AIDS) (Table 2). The second highest number of HIV infections were reported among homo-/bisexuals (22% for HIV, 9% for AIDS). No infections occurred among IDUs.

Table 2: Distribution of cumulative reported HIV/AIDS cases by sex and mode of transmission in the Republic of Korea through June 1999

	HIV (%)	AIDS (%)
Sex		
Male	87	91
Female	13	9
Mode of transmission		
Homo/bisexual	22	9
IDUs	0	0
Heterosexual	62	74
Blood products	4	0
Mother to infant	<1	3
Other/unknown	12	15

**Active
HIV/AIDS
surveillance**

General population surveys have been conducted since the late 1980s, and the number of HIV infections detected has remained quite low (prevalence rate of 0.002% in 1996, 0.003% in 1998). HIV prevalence rate among SWs varied from 0.015% to 0.039% in 1993-1995. HIV prevalence rates among seafarers were between 0.007% and 0.071% (Centre for AIDS Research of the Ministry of Health and Welfare). HIV prevalence rate among blood donors was 0.001% in 1993-1995.

Estimates and projections for HIV/AIDS

Estimates for HIV prevalence and AIDS incidence developed in 1996 by national and international experts and endorsed by the government are shown in Table 3. An estimated 3400 HIV infected persons were living in the country in 1998. This number will continue to grow at a slow rate, and is projected to reach 3880 by 2000 (Table 3). An estimated 13% of HIV infections occurred in women (Table 4).

Table 3: Estimates and projections for HIV/AIDS in the Republic of Korea, 1998 and 2000

		1998	2000*
Population (15-49) (thousands)		27 001	27 442
AIDS	Incidence	160	--
	Incidence rate in adults (15-49)	<0.1%	--
HIV	Prevalence	3400	3880
	Prevalence rate in adults (15-49)	<0.1%	<0.1%

*Projections of AIDS incidence were not made because it would have required adjustment for the impact of antiretroviral treatment.

Table 4: Selected HIV/AIDS epidemiological features in the Republic of Korea (1998 estimates)

	Prevalence	3400
	Prevalence rate in adults (15-49)	<0.1%
Women among HIV infected population		13%
HIV Infection by mode of transmission	Sexual contact	93%
	Injecting drug use	<1%
	Others	7%
Estimated reporting rate for HIV		21%
Estimated reporting rate for AIDS		29%

STI other than HIV

Reported cases The number of STI reported by all Health Centers, which regularly screen registered high-risk groups (including sex workers), was between 51 905 and 38 220 in 1991-1998. Prevalence rates of syphilis and gonorrhoea among registered women in 1998 were 0.39% and 1.11%, respectively.

Active STI surveillance Periodic active surveillance of STI has not been established yet.

Estimates for STI National estimates for syphilis were developed based on prevalence data from syphilis screening among blood donors. In 1998, the estimated number of people with syphilis was 32 500 (representing a prevalence rate in the total population of 0.07%).

Gonococcal antimicrobial resistance Data from the GASP show that, from 1992 through 1998, 80 to 91% of gonococcal isolates were resistant to penicillin and 16 to 20% were resistant to quinolones. No trends were noted in gonococcal antimicrobial resistance.

HIV and STI Risk Behaviour Surveillance

Results of ad hoc studies among 4635 FSWs conducted during 1995-1996 indicate that 31% were less than 20 years old and that 58% worked in urban areas. Many of these FSWs reported using drugs and most had a history of STI. One study of 610 Seoul FSWs found that 48% reported using condoms most of the time and 84% knew that condoms could prevent HIV transmission.