

SOUTH PACIFIC

Summary

Data from the following 20 Pacific Island countries and territories were collected and analyzed for this report: American Samoa, Cook Islands, Fiji, French Polynesia, Guam, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, New Caledonia, Niue, Northern Mariana Islands, Palau, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, and Wallis and Futuna.

Only sporadic HIV/AIDS cases have been reported in the South Pacific, which suggests that HIV seroprevalence remains low. As of September 1999, 612 HIV infections (including 223 AIDS cases) had been reported to the WHO Regional Office for Western Pacific. Three territories (French Polynesia, Guam and New Caledonia) have accounted for 80% of reported HIV infections and 81% of AIDS cases. The majority of reported cases occurred among men, with sexual contact being the most frequently reported mode of transmission. The proportion of heterosexual cases has increased over the last few years. Surveys conducted in some countries and territories show that curable STI are common.

Surveillance Structure

- The case definition used for AIDS surveillance varies by country and territory.
- HIV and AIDS cases are notifiable to the Health Authorities in all countries and territories.
- Other notifiable STI also vary by country and territory.

HIV/AIDS

Reported cases as of September 1999

A total of 612 HIV infections, including 223 AIDS cases, had been reported to WPRO as of September 1999 (Table 1). Five countries/territories (American Samoa, Cook Islands, Niue, Tokelau, Vanuatu) have not as yet reported any HIV infections.

Table 1: Reported cases of HIV/AIDS by year of diagnosis in the South Pacific as of September 1999

	1985 or unknown	85	86	87	88	89	90	91	92	93	94	95	96	97	98	99	Total
AIDS	6	1	7	9	12	13	20	22	7	25	31	13	21	16	13	7	223
HIV/AIDS	5	2	29	37	37	39	49	55	37	47	50	51	54	50	47	23	612

* Some countries/territories have not reported to WPRO for 1997, 1998, and/or 1999. Thus, data from 1997 to 1999 do not include all countries/territories in the South Pacific.

Most cases occurred in male, although sex remained unknown for large proportion of cases (Table 2). Homo-/bisexual and heterosexual contacts were the most frequently reported modes of transmission (Table 2). However, data should be interpreted with caution given the high number of unspecified cases for sex and mode of transmission.

Table 2: Distribution of cumulative reported HIV/AIDS cases by sex and mode of transmission in the South Pacific through September 1999

	HIV (%)	AIDS (%)
Sex		
Male	62	50
Female	18	9
Unknown	20	41
Mode of transmission		
Homo-/bisexual	31	30
IDU	7	6
Heterosexual	23	20
Blood products	3	3
Mother to infant	2	2
Other/unknown	34	39

**Active
HIV/AIDS
surveillance**

Few HIV seroprevalence studies have been conducted in the South Pacific. Limited data have been collected in some countries among populations of blood donors, pregnant women, STI clinic patients, and immigrant groups. Most such studies have identified few if any HIV infections.

A survey conducted in French Polynesia in 1991 reported an HIV prevalence rate of 1.4% among FSWs and 3.8% among homosexuals. However, the sample size was small and results should be interpreted with caution.

Estimates and projections for HIV/AIDS

Data are insufficient to allow estimates on magnitude of HIV infections in the general adult population in the South Pacific.

STI other than HIV

Reported cases

In New Caledonia, reported cases of syphilis, chlamydia, and gonorrhoea decreased from 1990 to 1997 (Table 3).

Table 3: Reported number of STI cases in New Caledonia, 1990-1997

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997
Syphilis	276	272	246	211	195	175	60	49
Gonorrhoea	350	265	212	161	178	142	80	100
Chlamydia	528	442	348	312	317	198	157	149

Reported gonorrhoea cases decreased in Guam (from 395 in 1990 to 131 in 1994), North Mariana Islands (from 125 in 1990 to 49 in 1994), and Tonga (from 46 in 1988 to 14 in 1989). In the Marshall Islands, there were 109 gonorrhoea cases in 1993 (1.9/1000) and 35 in 1994 (0.62/1000).

Only a few syphilis cases were reported in Guam (2-4 during 1990 to 1994). Fewer than 10 cases were reported in North Mariana Islands (1991-1993) and no cases were reported in Palau or Vanuatu (1990-1994).

Reported STI cases are increasing in the Solomon Islands. There were 901 gonorrhoea cases and 104 syphilis cases in 1993; these numbers increased to 974 and 224, respectively, in 1994.

Active STI surveillance

An STI survey assessed prevalence among pregnant women in Suva, Fiji in 1985-1986 and again in 1997. Findings showed decreases in STI (8.9% to 8.2% for syphilis, 2.3% to 0.5% for gonorrhoea, 45% to 19.5% for chlamydia). Recent studies of pregnant women found chlamydia prevalence rates of 12% in Cook Islands and 33% in Marshall Islands. Another study in French Polynesia in 1991 found a chlamydia prevalence rate of 67.9% among homosexuals and 60.8% among FSWs. The same study reported a syphilis prevalence rate of 16.7% among homosexuals and 60.8% among FSWs.

Estimates for STI Estimates for prevalence of STI in the South Pacific have been developed by the WHO Office for Western Pacific Region. These figures are based on available STI surveys in selected population groups (Table 4).

Table 4: Estimated prevalence of selected STI in the South Pacific, 1996

	Gonorrhoea	Syphilis	Chlamydia	Trichomoniasis
Prevalence rate in adults (*)	0.4%	8%	13%	11%
Prevalence	9000	180 000	290 000	248 000

(*) Population 15 and above

Gonococcal antimicrobial resistance Penicillin resistance data are available for Fiji, New Caledonia, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and Vanuatu. Resistance in 1998 was relatively high in Solomon Islands (35.9%), but low in other areas (0%-9%). Quinolone resistance in 1998 was 0% in Fiji, 7.5% in New Caledonia, and 0% in Solomon Islands. These were the only areas for which resistance data were available.

HIV and STI Risk Behaviour Surveillance

Sexual behaviour and social norms vary considerably in these diverse countries and territories. Although there are no organized sex industries, SWs are present. One study of 3500 people between the ages of 16 and 25 years in New Caledonia found that 68% of respondents had had at least one sexual experience (74% of males, 63% of females). Findings also showed that 3% had been involved in sex work either as a client or as a SW (5% for males, 1% for females); 25% had had more than 2 sexual partners during the previous year. Among those who had had sexual intercourse at least once, 65% used condoms at least once. Among those with regular partners, 60% had used condoms at least once, but this was true for only 38% of subjects with no regular sexual partner.