



In Focus

World AIDS Day, 1 December 2016

Background

World AIDS Day has been held on 1 December each year since 1988, when it was introduced as the first official World Health Organisation (WHO) health day, mandated by the World Health Assembly.¹ In the UK, the National AIDS Trust (NAT) has stated that marking World AIDS Day is “important because it reminds the public and [the] Government that HIV has not gone away—there is still a vital need to raise money, increase awareness, fight prejudice and improve education”.²

Global Picture

In June 2016, the UN General Assembly agreed that efforts to ‘end AIDS by 2030’ required a ‘fast-track’ response to reach three milestones by 2020:

- Reduce new HIV infections to fewer than 500,000 globally by 2020.
- Reduce AIDS-related deaths to fewer than 500,000 globally by 2020.
- Eliminate HIV-related stigma and discrimination by 2020.³

In a progress report published in 2016, UNAIDS (the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS) stated that although the world was “on track” to reach the target on AIDS-related deaths and “steep declines” had been secured in the annual number of new HIV infections among children, “problems” remained with HIV prevention globally.⁴ It stated that declines in new HIV infections among adults had slowed, “threatening further progress towards the end of the AIDS epidemic”, and that since 2010, the annual number of new infections among adults (aged over 15) had “remained static at an estimated 1.9 million”. This meant that efforts to reach fewer than 500,000 new HIV infections by 2020 were therefore “off track”.

In November 2016, the WHO estimated that more people globally—2.1 million—had become infected with HIV during the course of 2015.⁵ The WHO also stated that approximately 36.7 million people were living with HIV worldwide at the end of 2015, of whom 18.2 million were receiving antiretroviral treatment. Ahead of World AIDS Day 2016, the WHO published a factsheet which included these and other ‘key facts’. The information included was as follows:

- HIV continues to be a major global public health issue, having claimed more than 35 million lives so far. In 2015, 1.1 million (0.9–1.3 million) people died from HIV-related causes globally.
- There were approximately 36.7 million (34.0–39.8 million) people living with HIV at the end of 2015 with 2.1 million (1.8–2.4 million) people becoming newly infected with HIV in 2015 globally.
- Sub-Saharan Africa is the most affected region, with 25.6 million (23.1–28.5 million) people living with HIV in 2015. Also sub-Saharan Africa accounts for two-thirds of the global total of new HIV infections.

- HIV infection is often diagnosed through rapid diagnostic tests (RDTs), which detect the presence or absence of HIV antibodies. Most often these tests provide same-day test results; essential for same day diagnosis and early treatment and care.
- There is no cure for HIV infection. However, effective antiretroviral (ARV) drugs can control the virus and help prevent transmission so that people with HIV, and those at substantial risk, can enjoy healthy, long and productive lives.
- It is estimated that currently only 60 percent of people with HIV know their status. The remaining 40 percent or over 14 million people need to access HIV testing services. By mid-2016, 18.2 million (16.1–19.0 million) people living with HIV were receiving antiretroviral therapy (ART) globally.
- Between 2000 and 2015, new HIV infections fell by 35 percent, AIDS-related deaths fell by 28 percent with some 8 million lives saved. This achievement was the result of great efforts by national HIV programmes supported by civil society and a range of development partners.
- Expanding ART to all people living with HIV and expanding prevention choices can help avert 21 million AIDS-related deaths and 28 million new infections by 2030.⁶

United Kingdom

In 2014, Public Health England (PHE) estimated that 103,700 people were living with HIV in the UK, of whom 69,200 were men and 34,400 were women.⁷ In addition, an estimated 18,100 (17 percent) of this total population “were unaware of their infection and at risk of unknowingly passing on HIV if having sex without a condom”. PHE added that the estimated number and proportion of people living with undiagnosed HIV had declined since 2010 (from 22,800 and 25 percent respectively), with the majority of this decline taking place before 2012. For further information on HIV/AIDS in the UK, see the House of Lords Library briefing [HIV Infection in the United Kingdom](#) (9 August 2016).

Further Information

- UNAIDS, [Fast Track: Ending the AIDS Epidemic by 2030](#), 18 November 2014; and [UNAIDS Strategy 2016–2021: On the Fast-track to End AIDS](#), November 2015
- Public Health England, [HIV New Diagnoses, Treatment and Care in the UK: 2015 Report](#), October 2015; and [HIV in the UK—Situation Report 2015: Incidence, Prevalence and Prevention](#), November 2015
- Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology, [HIV Prevention in the UK](#), 31 March 2014

¹ World AIDS Day, ‘[About World AIDS Day](#)’; and World Health Organisation, ‘[Official WHO Health Days](#)’, accessed 29 November 2016.

² National AIDS Trust, [World AIDS Day](#), accessed 29 November 2016.

³ UNAIDS, [Prevention Gap Report](#), 2016, p 4.

⁴ *ibid.*

⁵ World Health Organisation, ‘[HIV/AIDS](#)’, November 2016.

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Public Health England, [HIV in the UK—Situation Report 2015: Incidence, Prevalence and Prevention](#), November 2015, p 4.

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