

H.I.V./AIDS – Whose problem is it? High School Level Activities (Prepared by Melisa Baker)

H.I.V. Region by Region

Despite prevention efforts, H.I.V. infections around the globe continue to rise (Source: UNAIDS).

Region of the World	Total pop. with H.I.V./AIDS	New infections in 1998	% of Adults Infected	Modes of Transmission in order of prevalence
Sub-Saharan Africa	22.5 million	4.0 million	8.0%	Heterosexual Sex
North Africa, Middle East	210,000	19,000	0.13	Intravenous Drug Use Heterosexual Sex
South & South East Asia	6.7 million	1.2 million	0.69	Heterosexual Sex
East Asia & Pacific	560,000	200,000	0.068	Intravenous Drug Use Heterosexual Sex Men having Sex with Men
Latin America	1.4 million	160,000	0.57	Men having Sex with Men Intravenous Drug Use Heterosexual Sex
Caribbean	330,000	45,000	1.96	Heterosexual Sex Men having Sex with Men
Eastern Europe & Central Asia	270,000	80,000	0.14	Intravenous Drug Use Men having Sex with Men
Western Europe	500,000	30,000	0.25	Men having Sex with Men Intravenous Drug Use
North America	890,000	44,000	0.56	Men having Sex with Men Intravenous Drug Use Heterosexual Sex
Australia & New Zealand	12,000	600	0.1	Men having Sex with Men Intravenous Drug Use

Questions to consider:

1. What regions are represented in the chart? In which region is the United States located?
2. How many people are infected with H.I.V./AIDS in Western Europe? In South & South East Asia?
3. Which region has the largest number of people infected with H.I.V./AIDS?
4. Which region has the fewest people infected with H.I.V./AIDS?
5. In 1998, how many people were infected with H.I.V./AIDS in Latin America?
6. What percentage of adults are infected with H.I.V./AIDS in North America?
7. What are the main causes of H.I.V./AIDS infection in Sub-Saharan Africa? North America?
8. According to this chart, is there one cause that is more common than any of the others?
9. What conclusions can you draw about the AIDS pandemic from this chart?
10. In your opinion, whose problem is the AIDS pandemic?

Follow-up assignment:

Write a letter your local newspaper demonstrating your knowledge about the spread of H.I.V./AIDS and your ideas for combatting the AIDS pandemic.

Fighting the Disease

by Geoffrey Cowley, Newsweek, January 17, 2000 (edited)

Can AIDS be stopped in Africa? The temptation, when we confront suffering on such a ghastly scale, is to assume it's beyond human control. But it's not. We know we can contain the spread of HIV, because vulnerable nations have already succeeded. Senegal has held its infection rate below 2 percent throughout the epidemic. And Uganda, once the plague's epicenter, cut its infection rate by half during the 1990's. Replicating such victories won't be easy; every community is different. A strategy that succeeds in one nation can fail in another. But researchers have learned a lot from the successes of the past two decades. Here are some prescriptions for slowing the devastation.

1. Break the silence. The first challenge is simply to face reality. Until recently, few African leaders acknowledged that AIDS was a problem. The disease still carries a strong stigma, but the official silence is breaking. The presidents of Zimbabwe and Kenya are now calling AIDS an urgent problem and many governments are teaming up with corporations and community groups to raise public awareness.

2. Promote safer sex. The greater challenge is to change the behavior that spreads the disease. If people only lacked information, a good leaflet might end the epidemic. The trouble is that no one, rich or poor, makes health choices on the basis of information alone. The most successful prevention efforts have aimed not just to inform people but to change social norms.

3. Target women. Unfortunately, African women are often powerless when it comes to protecting themselves from infection. Women account for 55 percent of the continent's HIV infections, and teenage girls suffer five to six times the infection rate of boys. "Empowering women is critical to controlling the epidemic," says Barry Bloom, dean of the Harvard School of Public Health.

4. Develop a vaccine. The ultimate weapon against any virus is a preventative vaccine. And on that front, progress has been slow. Drug development has flourished spectacularly during the past 15 years, but until recently no vaccine had even entered human clinical trials. The hurdles are political as well as technical. Of the estimated \$200 billion the world now spends on AIDS research, care and prevention each year, only \$300 million goes into vaccine research. However, trials for two experimental vaccines are now beginning to be backed by private foundations as well as national governments. No one expects miracles from these early vaccine candidates. We can only hope they lead to better ones before Africa loses another generation.

Questions to consider:

1. What are some of the strategies suggested to help slow the devastation caused by AIDS in Africa?
2. According to this article, why were some African governments reluctant to break the silence about the AIDS pandemic?
3. Why is it difficult to change people's behavior even when they are at risk of acquiring a disease like AIDS?
4. What do you think is the best solution to the AIDS epidemic in Africa? Do you agree with the suggestions made in the article? What would you add or change?