

The HIV/AIDS Epidemic in South Africa

June 2007

South Africa has more than 5 million people living with HIV/AIDS and is one of the countries hardest hit by the epidemic.^{1,2,3,4} South Africa's HIV/AIDS prevalence rate (the percent of people living with the disease) is much higher than that of the Sub-Saharan African region overall and is among the highest in the world,^{1,3,4} although prevalence rates have begun to stabilize.^{2,3,5} The epidemic has already had a profound impact on many aspects of South African society and is projected to affect the country's demographic structure and its economic, education, and health sectors if more is not done to stem its tide.^{1,3,6} As a middle-income country⁷ of significant political and economic importance in the African continent, the future course of the HIV/AIDS epidemic in South Africa will have broader implications for Africa overall. The Government of South Africa first established the National AIDS Coordinating Committee of South Africa (NACOSA) in 1992 and created the South African National AIDS Council (SANAC) in 2000.^{8,9} In March 2007, the government released its *HIV and AIDS and STI Strategic Plan for South Africa 2007–2011*, designed to guide the country's multisectoral response to HIV/AIDS.³ Comprehensive policies and interventions are in place and significant resources, both domestic and in the form of external aid, have been committed to address the epidemic in South Africa, yet many challenges remain.^{9,10} In addition, new threats such as the emergence of extensively drug resistant tuberculosis (XDR-TB) in the country may further complicate the response given the high rates of HIV/TB coinfection in South Africa and the high mortality associated with XDR-TB.^{2,11,12}

Figure 1: Top 20 Countries by HIV/AIDS Prevalence Rate, Sub-Saharan Africa (end 2005)^{1,14}

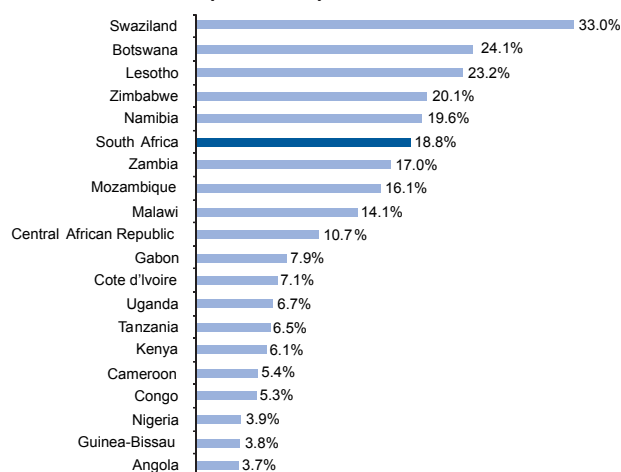
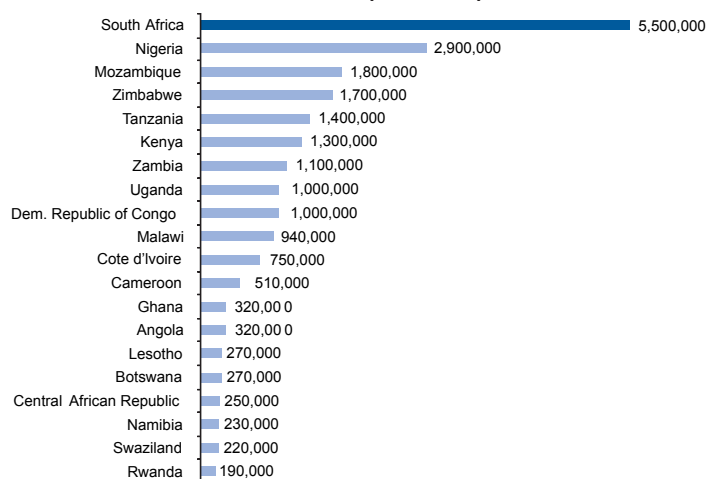


Figure 2: Top 20 Countries by Number of People Living with HIV/AIDS, Sub-Saharan Africa (end 2005)¹



Overview

- The first case of HIV/AIDS in South Africa was reported in 1982.¹³
- South Africa had an estimated 5.5 million people living with HIV/AIDS in 2005; the South African government's estimate for 2006 is similar at 5.4 million.^{1,3,4} This is the second highest number of any country in the world and highest on the African continent.^{1,3,4} Approximately 2 million South Africans infected with HIV do not know they are infected.²
- The HIV/AIDS prevalence rate¹⁴ in South Africa is between 18–19% (18.8% in 2005 and 18.3% in 2006), significantly higher than the rate in sub-Saharan Africa (5.9%) and globally (1.0%).^{1,2,3,4}
- In 2006, an estimated 350,000 South Africans died of HIV/AIDS.³ AIDS has been cited as the major cause of premature deaths in the country—AIDS-related deaths are estimated to have accounted for nearly half of all deaths in 2006 and overall death rates, from all causes, have increased by about 80% between 1997 and 2004 largely due to HIV/AIDS.^{3,4}
- HIV is spread primarily through heterosexual sex in South Africa.³

Populations and Regions Affected

- Women account for over half (55%) of adults¹⁵ estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS in South Africa.^{3,4}
- Young South Africans have been particularly affected by HIV/AIDS in South Africa, especially young women.^{1,2,3,4,5,16} Among young South Africans aged 15–24, young women are significantly more likely to be HIV-infected than young men.^{1,2,3,4} Young women aged 25–29 have the highest rates of infection in the country.³
- In 2006, 290,000 children¹⁷ in South Africa were estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS^{3,4} and there are more than one million AIDS orphans.^{1,4,18}
- There is significant variation in the epidemic's impact by region, with the highest rates occurring in KwaZulu-Natal, Mpumalanga and Gauteng and the lowest in the Western Cape, Northern Cape and Limpopo.^{3,4}

Other Key Data

- *Concern about HIV/AIDS and other epidemics:* South Africans are concerned about HIV/AIDS. More than nine in ten (96%) say that HIV/AIDS and other epidemics are a "very big" problem in their country. Over four-fifths (90%) of South Africans feel that HIV/AIDS and other infectious diseases are the greatest threat to the world.¹⁹ South African youth are also concerned about HIV/AIDS.^{16,20} Six in ten named HIV/AIDS as the most important issue facing young people in the country in a recent survey; six in ten also were very concerned about becoming infected with HIV in the next 10 years.²⁰

- **Knowledge of HIV/AIDS:** Studies have found that general awareness of HIV/AIDS in South Africa is high.^{9,16,20} Most young South Africans (aged 15–24) are knowledgeable about key aspects of HIV prevention and treatment, but small shares of youth still hold misconceptions about some key aspects of the epidemic.²⁰ Many South African youth say they would like more information about HIV/AIDS.²⁰
- **Access to Antiretroviral Therapy (ART):** The Government of South Africa is scaling up access to ART and will continue to do so over the next few years as the country implements its 2007–2011 Strategic Plan.³ The country already has the largest number of people on ART in the world, but with an estimated one million people in need of ART, South Africa also has one of the highest unmet needs for ART in the world. However, progress has been made. As of the end of 2006, an estimated 287,000–363,000 people in the country were receiving ART (about 33% of those in need) and South Africa accounted for one-quarter of all people receiving ART in Sub-Saharan Africa.²¹
- **Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission (PMTCT) of HIV:** In September 2001, the South African government initiated a national program to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV. In 2005, PMTCT services were available at over 3,000 health sites nationwide,⁹ making the program among the largest PMTCT programs in the world.²² The percentage of HIV positive pregnant women who received antiretrovirals to reduce the possibility of transmitting HIV to their infants increased from 22% to 30% between 2004 and 2005.²¹

Financing HIV/AIDS: Domestic and International Support

- Domestically, the HIV/AIDS response is primarily financed through the national health budget. In 2007, the budget for national HIV/AIDS programs is estimated to be R2.4 billion (approximately \$334 million USD).²³
- A number of donor governments also provide funding and other support to address South Africa's HIV/AIDS epidemic including: the United States, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Australia, Germany and the European Union.⁸ South Africa is one of the 15 focus countries of the United States Government's President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). U.S. bilateral aid for South Africa was \$221.5 million in FY2006.²⁴ The U.S. also provides support for HIV/AIDS efforts around the world through its contributions to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (The Global Fund).
- The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria has approved five HIV/AIDS grants (including HIV/TB grants) in South Africa.²⁵
- UNAIDS and the UN Family support a variety of HIV/AIDS activities in South Africa.⁸

Table 1: HIV/AIDS in South Africa

Indicator	South Africa	Sub-Saharan Africa	Global
Estimated number of people living with HIV/AIDS, 2006	5.4 million ^{3,4}	24.7 million ²	39.5 million ²
Percent of adult population estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS, 2006	18.3% ^{3,4}	5.9% ²	1.0% ²
Estimated number of deaths due to HIV/AIDS, 2006	350,000 ³	2.1 million ²	2.9 million ²
Women as percent of adults estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS, 2006 ¹⁵	55% ^{3,4}	59% ²	48% ²
Percent of young women, aged 15–24, estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS, 2005	14.8% ¹	4.3% ¹	NA
Percent of young men, aged 15–24, estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS, 2005	4.5% ¹	1.5% ¹	NA
Estimated number of AIDS orphans, 2005 ^{1,18}	1.2 million	12.0 million	15.2 million
Number of people estimated to be receiving ART, end 2006 ²¹	287,000–363,000	1,220,000–1,460,000	1,795,000–2,235,000
Number of people estimated to be in need of ART, 2006 ²¹	1 million	4.8 million	7.1 million

Key Sources/Websites

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