

The HIV/AIDS Epidemic in Asia

October 2008

Asia¹ (including East, South, and South-East Asia) is home to approximately 5 million people living with HIV.^{2,3} The epidemic varies considerably across this diverse region, in terms of the populations most affected, transmission patterns, and other factors. Prevalence rates (the percent of the population living with HIV) in Asia are highest in South-East Asia, and range by country, from 0.1% or less in a number of countries, including Bhutan, China, the Republic of Korea, and Mongolia, to a high of 1.4% in Thailand.^{2,3,4} While prevalence rates in the region are relatively low, Asia accounts for 15% of all people living with HIV/AIDS worldwide, largely due to epidemics in the populous countries of China and India where even small rates translate into high numbers of people. Smaller countries such as Thailand, Cambodia, and Myanmar face more intense epidemics, with higher prevalence rates, although each of these countries has experienced declines in recent years. Others, including Indonesia, Pakistan, and Viet Nam, face growing epidemics.^{2,5,7} Several factors complicate country responses to the epidemic in Asia, including poverty, stigma, discrimination, gender inequalities, human trafficking, worker migration, and lack of access to education and health care.^{2,5,6,7} Also, inadequate HIV/AIDS surveillance systems and limited government capacity and/or attention to HIV/AIDS have hindered responses in some countries.^{6,8} Despite these challenges, several countries have made remarkable strides in treatment and prevention efforts.^{2,6} Country responses have included the creation of national AIDS coordinating bodies, national strategic plans, and participation in regional networks.^{6,8}

Figure 1: Snapshot of the HIV/AIDS Epidemic in Asia, 2007^{2,9}

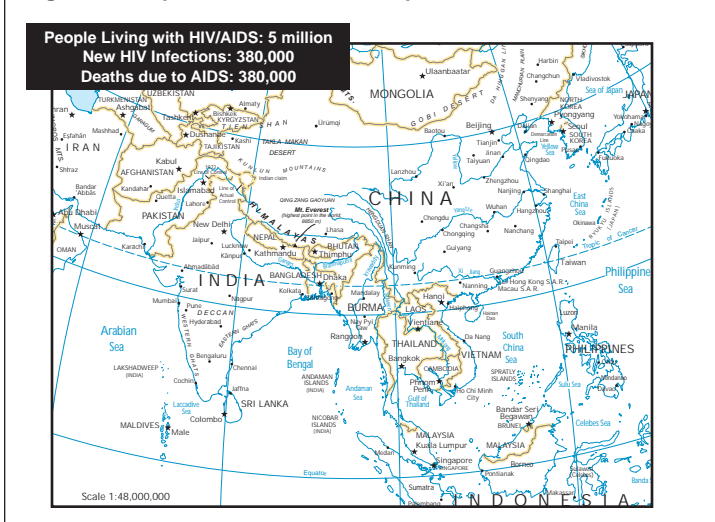
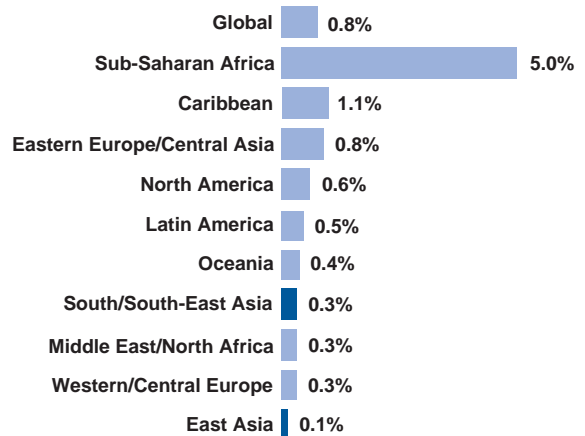


Figure 2: Percent of Adults Estimated to be Living with HIV/AIDS by Region, 2007^{2,4}



Overview

- In 2007, an estimated 5 million people were living with HIV/AIDS in Asia, 75% of whom resided in three countries—China and India, the two most populous countries in the world, and Thailand.^{2,3} India alone is home to more than 45% of all people living with HIV/AIDS in the region (2,400,000 people), and is the third largest epidemic of any country in the world behind South Africa and Nigeria.^{2,3,10}
- Within the region, HIV prevalence rates vary. Rates in East Asia and South/South-East Asia (0.1% and 0.3% in 2007, respectively) are lower than the global prevalence rate (0.8%), and prevalence rates in many countries across Asia have been stable in recent years.^{2,4} However, some countries, mostly those located in South/South-East Asia, have experienced increases in prevalence rates in recent years, including Indonesia, Pakistan, and Vietnam.⁷ In addition, the epidemic in the Papua province of Indonesia has been of particular concern, as a 2006 population-based survey found an adult HIV prevalence rate of 2.4%.²
- In 2007, there were about 380,000 new HIV infections and 380,000 deaths due to AIDS in Asia.^{3,10}
- HIV in Asia is spread primarily through sex, with commercial sex largely driving transmission in much of the region. Injecting drug use is a major risk factor in several Asian countries and there is growing concern about the overlap of sex work and injecting drug use as well as the transmission of HIV to the partners of those infected through commercial sex.² Finally, sex between men contributes to HIV transmission, particularly in Thailand and Viet Nam. Regional data show prevalence rates among men who have sex with men (MSM) are also high in parts of Indonesia, Cambodia, and India, but more research is needed to understand the extent of its impact.^{2,10}

Populations Affected

- Female sex workers, including those who are trafficked (the recruitment, transportation, and harboring of people for exploitation), are at high risk for HIV infection in Nepal, Thailand, Cambodia, India, and Indonesia. For instance, one study showed that up to half of all women and girls trafficked to Mumbai, India were HIV positive (among those tested).² Areas in South and South-East Asia, where condom use is low, face rising HIV prevalence rates among those who buy sex, their regular partners and sex workers.²
- In parts of Asia, MSM face significant risk, although the impact on MSM in the region is not well understood.^{2,11} Data show prevalence rates among this population range from a low of 0.2% in Bangladesh to more than 20% in Thailand.^{2,11}

- More than one-third (35%) of adults (aged 15 and older) living with HIV/AIDS in Asia are women, a proportion that has remained relatively stable in recent years.²
- Injecting drug use plays a major role in the epidemics of Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Viet Nam.^{2,8,12} Also, nearly half of those living with HIV/AIDS in China are believed to have been infected through injecting drugs and more than two-thirds of HIV infections to date in Malaysia have been among injecting drug users.²
- In 2007, an estimated 147,800 children under the age of 15 were living with HIV in Asia; 23,000 were newly infected in 2007.³

Other Key Data and Information

- **Social and Economic Issues:** Stigma, discrimination, and cultural norms in Asia have hampered discussions about safer sex practices and other prevention efforts, as well as inhibited the willingness and ability of certain populations to seek services—especially those most at risk.^{2,12} Mobility among migrant workers and truckers within the region is associated with the epidemic and increases the risk of HIV for certain populations.⁸ For poor families, caring for a relative living with HIV can exacerbate poverty as government assistance and social programs are limited in many Asian countries.^{2,6}
- **Access to Prevention:** The availability of prevention services in Asia has increased over time, helping to stabilize the epidemic in some countries.^{6,12} Most notably, Thailand and Cambodia initiated prevention campaigns encouraging condom-use among sex workers and those who purchase sex which resulted in significant reductions in prevalence rates. Local-level prevention efforts in Indonesia lowered HIV transmission rates among men who have sex with men.^{6,11} China and Viet Nam are scaling-up harm reduction programs for injecting drug users.¹² There also has been a renewed and growing focus on prevention education in Asia.¹³ However, significant gaps in the availability of targeted prevention programs for populations most at risk remain.^{6,7,12}
- **Access to Antiretroviral Therapy (ART):** The number of people receiving ART in Asia has grown considerably over time. Between 2003 and the end of 2007, there was a six-fold increase in the number of people receiving ART (from 70,000 to 420,000 people).¹² Despite tremendous scale-up efforts in the region, only 25% of those in need of ART are receiving treatment, and its availability varies significantly.¹²

International Support/Major Donors

- Many countries in Asia rely on international support for HIV/AIDS programs and related efforts, although several are able to use their own domestic government resources to respond to the epidemic.²
- Asia is home to one of the 15 “focus” countries of the U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)—Viet Nam. Viet Nam received \$65.8 million in FY 2007 and is expected to receive \$88.9 million in FY 2008.¹⁴ PEPFAR also provided bilateral funding to 12 other Asian countries totaling more than \$93 million in FY 2007 and will provide over \$89 million in FY 2008 to 13 countries.
- The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (The Global Fund) approved HIV/AIDS grants for 20 countries in Asia. In addition, China, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, and Thailand have made contributions to The Global Fund.¹⁵
- UNAIDS and its 10 co-sponsors support many HIV/AIDS programs, partnerships, and other activities throughout Asia. UNAIDS, for example, reinvigorated the focus on HIV prevention for injecting drug users. Efforts also include World Bank-sponsored projects that strengthen HIV/AIDS strategic planning and International Labor Organization assistance on legal reforms.^{8,16,17}
- The Asian Development Bank has provided support for HIV/AIDS-related initiatives for more than a decade throughout Asia and has recently committed to expanding HIV/AIDS prevention, program evaluation, and capacity-building in the region.¹⁷

Indicator ^{1,2,3}	East Asia	South/South-East Asia	Global
Estimated number of people living with HIV/AIDS, 2007	740,000	4.2 million	33 million
Percent of adult population estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS, 2007 ⁴	0.1%	0.3%	0.8%
Estimated number of deaths due to HIV/AIDS, 2007	40,000	340,000	2.0 million
Women as percent of adults (15+) estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS, 2007	27%	37%	50%
Percent of young women, aged 15–24, estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS, 2007	<0.1%	0.5%	0.6%
Percent of young men, aged 15–24, estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS, 2007	<0.1%	0.3%	0.4%

Additional Resources/Websites

- UNAIDS, *Asia* [website]: <http://www.unaids.org/en/CountryResponses/Regions/Asia.asp>
- Coalition of Asia Pacific Regional Network on HIV/AIDS: <http://www.7sisters.org/>
- AIDS Society of Asia and the Pacific (ASAP): <http://www.aidsocietyap.org/>
- Asia Pacific Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (APN+): <http://www.apnplus.org/>
- Asian People’s Alliance for Combating HIV & AIDS (APACHA): <http://www.apachanet.org/>
- Asia-Pacific Media AIDS Initiative: http://www.thegmai.org/membership_regional.cfm

References

- 1 For the purposes of this fact sheet, Asia is defined as including countries in East, South, and South-East Asia. UNAIDS provides HIV/AIDS estimates for these sub-regions and many countries within them. According to the UNAIDS, *2008 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic*, the countries comprising East Asia are China, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Japan, Mongolia, and Republic of Korea. The countries comprising South and South-East Asia are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste, and Viet Nam.
- 2 UNAIDS, *2008 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic*; 2008.
- 3 UNAIDS/WHO, *Core Slides: Global Summary of the HIV and AIDS Epidemic, 2007*; 2008.
- 4 Among those between the ages of 15 and 49.
- 5 UNDP, *You and AIDS—The HIV/AIDS Portal for Asia Pacific* [website]: <http://www.youandaids.org>.
- 6 Commission on AIDS in Asia, *Redefining AIDS in Asia—Creating an Effective Response*; March 2008.
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- 8 World Bank, *AIDS in South Asia, Understanding and Responding to a Heterogeneous Epidemic*; 2006.
- 9 CIA, *The World Factbook, Reference Maps* [website]: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/docs/refmaps.html>.
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- 11 AMFAR, *TREAT Asia, MSM and HIV/AIDS Risk in Asia: What is Fueling the Epidemic Among MSM and How Can it Be Stopped?*; August 2006.
- 12 WHO/UNAIDS/UNICEF, *Towards Universal Access: Scaling Up Priority HIV/AIDS Interventions in the Health Sector, Progress Report*; June 2008.
- 13 Deutsche Presse-Agentur, *Asian Health Officials Vow to Intensify HIV-Prevention Campaign*; September 2008: http://www.msmania.org/news_article/items/Asian_health_officials_vow_to_intensify_HIV-prevention_campaign.html.
- 14 President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, *Fiscal Year 2008 Operational Plan*: <http://www.pepfar.gov/about/c19388.htm>.
- 15 The Global Fund [website]: www.theglobalfund.org.
- 16 UNAIDS, *UNAIDS at Country Level: Supporting Countries As They Move Toward Universal Access*; February 2007.
- 17 *Joint Initiative by Development Agencies for the Infrastructure Sectors to Mitigate the Spread of HIV/AIDS*; August 2008: http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTTSR/Resources/060811JointstatementHIV_final_.pdf.

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