

“New surveys to pin AIDS count”--*Indian Express*

February 16th, 2006

By Toufiq Rashid

NEW DELHI: This is a step the government hopes will put an end to the controversy over the AIDS count in the country — two health surveys that have been initiated will rely more on head count than estimation.

While one survey is underway in the country to estimate HIV/AIDS prevalence in the general population, another is being started in five high- prevalence states. “We want to have some conclusive idea in the general population as well as high-risk population,” said Dr Arvind Pandey, director of the National Institute of Medical statistics.

The survey for HIV/AIDS numbers in the general population is part of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS)-III which has been started from 2005-end. This multi-round survey conducted in a representative sample of households throughout India included HIV/AIDS as a component for the first time.

The survey is a collaborative project of the International Institute for Population Sciences (IIPS), Mumbai and international agencies like ORC Macro, USA and National Institute of Medical Statistics in Delhi. Officials said a sample of about 20 lakh people from households across the country will be tested to know the accurate prevalence of the disease in India. “While consent would be taken but complete anonymity will be maintained,” said Dr Pandey.

The second survey is being done under the Avahan project of Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The foundation along with Family Health Institute and ICMR is starting bio-behavioural study in five high-prevalence states — Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, Nagaland and Manipur.

“NFHS study is the largest survey conducted in the world. The sample is very large. It will help in getting a better picture,” said Denis Broun, country representative UNAIDS.