

The HIV/AIDS Epidemic in South Africa

October 2008

Home to more than 5 million people living with HIV/AIDS, South Africa is one of the countries hardest hit by the AIDS epidemic.^{1,2,3,4} South Africa's HIV/AIDS prevalence rate (the percent of people living with HIV/AIDS) is among the highest in the world, although prevalence rates have begun to stabilize and there is evidence that the epidemic may be declining among certain populations.^{1,2,3,4} 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.^{1,2,5} As a middle-income country⁶ 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.^{7,8} In March 2007, the government released a new five year plan to address the epidemic: *HIV and AIDS and STI Strategic Plan for South Africa 2007–2011*, designed to guide the country's multisectoral response to HIV/AIDS.² Comprehensive policies and programs are in place and significant resources, mainly domestic and in the form of external aid, have been committed to address the epidemic in South Africa, yet many challenges remain.⁸ In addition, new threats in the country, such as the emergence of extensively drug resistant tuberculosis (XDR-TB) and high rates of HIV/TB co-infection, may further complicate the response to HIV.^{9,10}

Figure 1: Top 20 Countries by HIV/AIDS Prevalence Rate, Sub-Saharan Africa, 2007^{1,11}

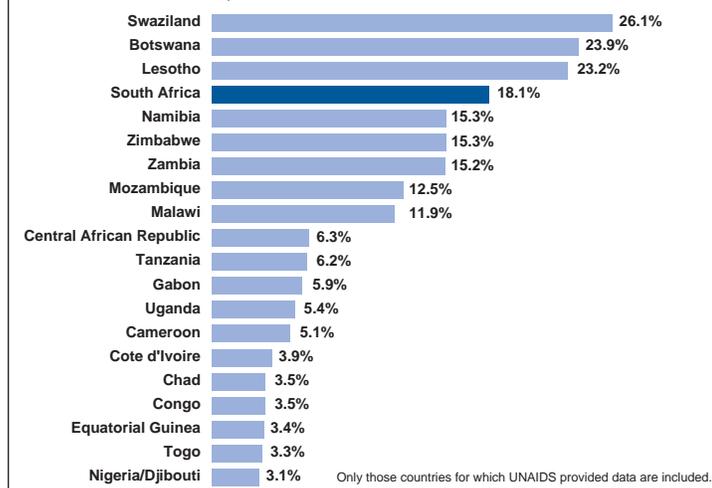
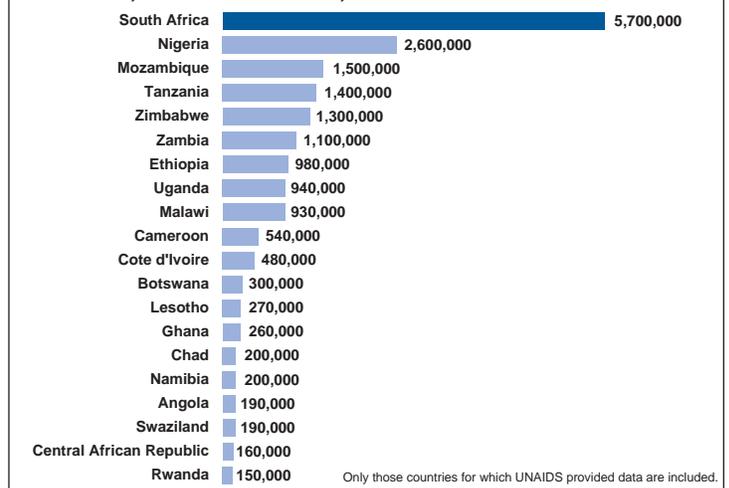


Figure 2: Top 20 Countries by Number of People Living with HIV/AIDS, Sub-Saharan Africa, 2007¹



Note: In September 2008, the Government of South Africa released new HIV prevalence estimates for the country, which are reflected in this fact sheet where appropriate.⁴ However, data for figures 1 and 2, as well as for the table on the second page of this fact sheet, are taken from UNAIDS, *2008 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic*, which contains the most recently available country-level data for purposes of comparison (standardized across countries).¹

Overview

- The first case of HIV/AIDS in South Africa was reported in 1982.¹²
- More than 5 million people were estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS in South Africa in 2007, the highest number of any country in the world.^{1,4}
- The HIV/AIDS prevalence rate¹¹ in South Africa is approximately 18%, significantly higher than the rate in sub-Saharan Africa (5.0%) and globally (0.8%).^{1,4}
- In 2007, an estimated 350,000 South Africans died of HIV/AIDS.¹ 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% largely due to HIV/AIDS.^{2,3}
- HIV is spread primarily through heterosexual sex in South Africa.^{1,2}

Populations and Regions Affected

- Women account for over half of adults aged 15 and over estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS in South Africa.¹
- Young South Africans have been particularly affected by HIV/AIDS, especially young women.^{1,2,3,13} Among young South Africans aged 15–24, young women are significantly more likely to be HIV-infected than young men.^{1,2,3} There are some promising signs, however, as recent data from antenatal clinics show that prevalence among young women aged 15–24 is declining.⁴
- South Africa has one of the highest numbers of children living with HIV/AIDS in the world, although estimates vary. The Government of South Africa estimates that there were more than 180,000 children under the age of 15 with HIV/AIDS in the country in 2007;⁴ UNAIDS estimates this number to be higher (280,000 children) and that there were also more than one million AIDS orphans in 2007.^{1,14}
- There is significant variation in the epidemic's impact by region, with the highest rates occurring in KwaZulu-Natal and Mpumalanga, and the lowest in the Western Cape and Northern Cape.^{2,3,15}

Other Key Data

- *Concern about HIV/AIDS and Other Epidemics:* South Africans are concerned about HIV/AIDS. More than eight in ten (88%) say that HIV/AIDS and other epidemics are a “very big” problem in their country and nine in ten (91%) South Africans say that HIV/AIDS is a bigger problem in their country today than it was 5 years ago.¹⁶ South African youth also express concern about HIV/AIDS.^{13,17} 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.¹⁷
- *Knowledge of HIV/AIDS:* Studies have found that general awareness of HIV/AIDS in South Africa is high.^{13,17} 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.¹⁷ Many South African youth say they would like more information about HIV/AIDS.¹⁷
- *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.² The country already has the largest number of people on ART in the world, but with an estimated 1.7 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 2007, an estimated 460,000 people were receiving ART.¹⁸
- *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. By 2005, PMTCT services were available at thousands of health sites nationwide, making the program among the largest PMTCT programs in the world.¹⁹ Between 2006 and 2007, the government of South Africa reported that the number of PMTCT sites increased during the year.⁸ The percentage of HIV positive pregnant women who received antiretrovirals to reduce the possibility of transmitting HIV to their infants has also increased over time, reaching 57% in 2007.¹⁸

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 was estimated to be R3.4 billion (approximately \$480 million USD).⁸
- 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.^{7,8} South Africa is one of the 15 focus countries of the United States Government’s President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). PEPFAR funding for South Africa was \$397.8 million in FY2007.²⁰ 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).²¹
- The Global Fund has approved 5 HIV/AIDS grants (including HIV/TB grants) in South Africa, totaling \$228.7 million in approved funding.
- UNAIDS and the UN Family support a variety of HIV/AIDS activities in South Africa.^{7,22}

Indicator ^{1,18}	South Africa	Sub-Saharan Africa	Global
Estimated number of people living with HIV/AIDS, 2007	5.7 million	22 million	33 million
Percent of adult population estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS, 2007 ¹¹	18.1%	5.0%	0.8%
Estimated number of deaths due to HIV/AIDS, 2007	350,000	1.5 million	2.0 million
Women as percent of adults (15+) estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS, 2007	59%	59%	50%
Percent of young women, aged 15–24, estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS, 2007	12.7%	3.2%	0.6%
Percent of young men, aged 15–24, estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS, 2007	4.0%	1.1%	0.4%
Estimated number of AIDS orphans, 2007 ¹⁴	1.4 million	11.6 million	15.0 million
Number of people estimated to be receiving ART, end 2007	460,000	2.1 million	3.0 million
Number of people estimated to be in need of ART, 2007	1.7 million	7.0 million	9.7 million

Additional Resources/Websites

- UNAIDS, South Africa Country Page: http://www.unaids.org/en/CountryResponses/Countries/south_africa.asp
- Government of South Africa, Department of Health: <http://www.doh.gov.za/>
- Government of South Africa, National HIV/AIDS and TB Unit, National Department of Health: <http://www.doh.gov.za/aids/index.html>
- Broadcast HIV Africa: www.broadcasthivafrica.org

References

- 1 UNAIDS, *2008 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic*; 2008.
- 2 Republic of South Africa, Department of Health, *HIV and AIDS and STI Strategic Plan for South Africa, 2007–2011*; March 2007.
- 3 Dorrington R, et al., *The Demographic Impact of HIV/AIDS in South Africa: National and Provincial Indicators for 2006*, Cape Town: Centre for Actuarial Research, South African Medical Research Council and Actuarial Society of South Africa; 2006.
- 4 Republic of South Africa, Department of Health, *The National HIV and Syphilis Prevalence Survey of South Africa 2007*; 2008.
- 5 Abt Associates, *The Impending Catastrophe, A Resource Book On The Emerging HIV/AIDS Epidemic in South Africa*; 2000.
- 6 World Bank, “Country Classification: Country Groups”: http://www.worldbank.org/data/countryclass/classgroups.htm#Upper_middle_income.
- 7 UNAIDS, *UNAIDS at Country Level: Progress Report*; 2004.
- 8 Republic of South Africa, Department of Health, *Progress Report on Declaration of Commitment on HIV and AIDS*, Prepared for United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV and AIDS, Reporting Period: January 2006–December 2007; 2008.
- 9 WHO, *Emergence of XDR-TB*: <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/news/notes/2006/np23/en/index.html>.
- 10 Kaiser Family Foundation, www.globalhealthfacts.org.
- 11 Among those between the ages of 15 and 49.
- 12 UNAIDS/WHO, “South Africa: Epidemiological Fact Sheet on HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infections – 2004 Update.”
- 13 Pettifor A, et al., *HIV and Sexual Behaviour among Young South Africans: A National Survey of 15–24 Year-Olds*; April 2004.
- 14 Aged 0–17, living in 2007, who have lost one or both parents to AIDS.
- 15 UNAIDS/WHO, *Summary Epidemiological Fact Sheet on HIV and AIDS*; July 2008.
- 16 Kaiser Family Foundation and Pew Global Attitudes Project, *A Global Look at Public Perceptions of Health Problems, Priorities, and Donors: The Kaiser/PEW Global Health Survey*; December 2007.
- 17 Kaiser Family Foundation and South African Broadcasting Corporation, *Young South Africans, Broadcast Media, and HIV/AIDS Awareness: Results of a National Survey*; March 2007.
- 18 WHO/UNAIDS/UNICEF, *Towards Universal Access: Scaling Up Priority HIV/AIDS Interventions in the Health Sector*, Progress Report; June 2008.
- 19 Thom A, “Many Challenges for Pregnant HIV Mothers Programme”; August 10, 2005. <http://www.health-e.org.za/news/article.php?uid=20031289>.
- 20 United States Government, State Department, Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator, “2007 Country Profile: South Africa”; 2007.
- 21 The Global Fund: www.theglobalfund.org.
- 22 UNAIDS, *UNAIDS at Country Level: Supporting Countries As They Move Towards Universal Access*; 2007.

This publication (#7365-06) is available on the Kaiser Family Foundation’s website at www.kff.org.

The Kaiser Family Foundation is a non-profit private operating foundation, based in Menlo Park California, dedicated to producing and communicating the best possible information, research and analysis on health issues.