

JOINT PRESS RELEASE

Investing in HIV response essential to curb on-going HIV transmission in Europe.

Stockholm/Copenhagen, 30 November 2012

New data for 2011 show that more than 121 000 new HIV cases were reported in the WHO European Region, including more than 28 000 new infections in the European Union and the European Economic Area (EU/EEA), indicating an increase for the whole Region compared to the previous year¹. The growing number suggests that it is vital to sustain HIV interventions even in times of economic austerity in order to curb the on-going HIV transmission across Europe.

The new report released today by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the WHO Regional Office for Europe² to mark World AIDS Day, indicates that while the number of new HIV cases has come down in many parts of the world, there are no signs for a decline of transmission in the EU/EEA and HIV is on the rise in Eastern Europe and central Asia.

Furthermore, on-going outbreaks of HIV among people who inject drugs in some EU countries highlight that previously low numbers can rapidly evolve into an outbreak when interventions are not sufficiently in place.

Speaking at a public health meeting in Athens on the eve of World AIDS Day, **ECDC Director Marc Sprenger** stressed: "Several recent examples from different EU countries show that failure to break the chain of HIV transmission will inevitably lead to high long-term HIV prevalence. We see from our data that 50 % of the newly infected get tested late. If we want to reduce and prevent further transmission of HIV across Europe, we need to invest in and promote HIV counselling and testing. This way we ensure early diagnosis as well as access and adherence to treatment, decrease the number of late presenters and improve the longer term treatment outcomes for the individuals concerned."

"The global financial crisis is challenging governments to invest in improved access to effective health interventions to prevent, test and treat HIV/AIDS. Only one patient in four receives the needed antiretroviral treatment in the Eastern part of the Region, a rate that is among the lowest in the world", **says Zsuzsanna Jakab, WHO Regional Director for Europe**. "We urgently need to scale up resources especially in Eastern Europe and central Asia. Every euro spent on the HIV response now will be largely paid back with the savings on future treatment costs, not counting the societal gains by keeping people healthy and productive".

----- **Background on the situation in the EU/EEA:**

In the EU/EEA, HIV is highly concentrated in key populations such as men who have sex with men, who account for the majority of cases, persons originating from countries with generalised HIV epidemics and people who inject drugs. The number of HIV infections among people who inject drugs remained fairly low across the EU/EEA (5% of HIV diagnoses in 2011) with a 40% decline between 2004 and 2011.

During the Forum on Public Health and Social Medicine held in Athens on 30 November, ECDC presented the findings from an in-depth assessment on the HIV situation in Greece. The assessment shows that the current outbreak among people who inject drugs in Athens may be caused by a combination of factors, one of the most important being long-term low levels of preventive services prior to the outbreak. In response to the outbreak, the Greek authorities immediately prioritised the correct interventions, for example scaling up the coverage of opioid substitution treatment and needle and syringe programmes.

The number of AIDS cases has consistently declined in the EU/EEA since the mid-1990s.

Further information on the situation in the WHO European Region:

The new data show that over three quarters of the new HIV new infections were from the eastern part of the European Region. Half of the newly diagnosed people in the Region learn of their HIV status late, when the benefits of treatment are reduced. Late diagnosis together with low treatment coverage result in increasing numbers of AIDS cases and deaths in Eastern Europe and central Asia, showing no sign of stabilisation or decline.

HIV is still highly concentrated in key populations, such as men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs, and people originating from high endemic countries. The new data also indicate an increase in heterosexual transmission, now exceeding 50% of cases in the European Region. In couples where one of the partners is engaged in a high-risk behaviour, prevention intervention should address the risk of heterosexual transmission.

The newly published surveillance report further supports the recommendations of the European Action Plan for HIV/AIDS 2012-2015 that all countries of the European Region endorsed in 2011. It highlights the need to further promote HIV counselling and testing services throughout Europe to ensure that each and every person living with HIV is diagnosed and treated early. Action should especially address key populations, pay attention to reducing vulnerability and involve patients' organisations and the civil society. This will result in improved treatment outcomes and clinical benefits, as well as contributing to preventing or reducing further HIV transmission.

Notes to editors:

World AIDS Day is celebrated on December 1 each year around the world. It has become one of the most recognised international health days and a key opportunity to raise awareness, commemorate those who have passed on, and celebrate victories such as increased access to treatment and prevention services.

WHO European Region: The region comprises 53 countries, with a population of nearly 900 million people, of which around 508 million live in **the EU/EEA** (27 EU Member States plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway).

[ECDC-WHO report HIV/AIDS surveillance in Europe 2011](#) (available online from 30 November 2012)

[ECDC risk assessment on the HIV situation in Greece](#) (available online from 30 November 2012)

[ECDC HIV testing guidance](#)

[ECDC-EMCDDA guidance *Prevention and control of infectious diseases among people who inject drugs*](#)

[Visit the WHO website](#)

[European Action Plan for HIV/AIDS 2012-2015](#)[HIV/AIDS country profiles 2011](#)[The ECDC Programme on sexually transmitted infections including HIV and blood-borne viruses](#)**CONTACT:****ECDC press office**

Tel.: +46 (0) 8 586 01 678

E-mail: press@ecdc.europa.eu**WHO Regional Office for Europe**

Cristiana Salvi, Communications Officer, Division of Communicable Diseases, Health Security and Environment

Tel.: +45 39171379, +45 29634218 (mobile)

E-mail: csa@euro.who.int

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) is an EU agency tasked with identifying assessing and communicating threats to human health posed by infectious diseases. It supports the work of public health authorities in the EU and EEA/EEA Member States.

¹ Nearly 54 000 new HIV cases were reported to ECDC/WHO. In addition, over 67 000 new infections were recorded in Russia.

² ECDC, WHO Regional Office for Europe. *HIV/AIDS surveillance in Europe 2011*. Stockholm, European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, 2012.