

JOINT PRESS RELEASE

HIV infections up by 8% across Europe

More testing and better treatment coverage recommended

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According to new data published today by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) and the WHO Regional Office for Europe, more than 131 000 new HIV infections were reported in the WHO European Region in 2012, 10 000 (8%) more than in 2011. This confirms a steady increase across Europe over the last year: a 9% rise in eastern Europe and central Asia (EECA) countries and a less than 1% rise in the countries of the European Union and European and Economic Area (EU/EEA).

Of the new HIV infections in the Region, almost 102 000 were reported in the EECA and over 29 000 in the EU/EEA. The total number includes more than 55 000 newly diagnosed HIV infections in 2012 reported to ECDC and the WHO, and nearly 76 000 new cases recorded by the Federal Statistics Agency of the Russian Federation through its database.

While reported AIDS cases showed a steady decline of 48% in the EU/EEA between 2006 and 2012, the number of people newly diagnosed with AIDS increased by 113% in the eastern part of the Region. This increase is closely linked to low coverage of prevention measures and antiretroviral therapy (ART). Although the number of people who received ART increased considerably from 2011 to 2012, they represent only one in three people in need.

“Our data show that nearly every second person tested positive for HIV in the EU/EEA – that’s 49% – is diagnosed late in the course of their infection – which means they need antiretroviral therapy right away because their immune system is already starting to fail”, highlights **ECDC Director Marc Sprenger**. “This shows that we need to make HIV testing more available across Europe to ensure earlier diagnosis and more effective treatment and care.” The [ECDC HIV testing guidance](#) helps countries in their efforts to identify HIV infections early: it provides key information on why, where, how and when to test for HIV.

“We know that providing antiretroviral therapy earlier will allow people with HIV to live longer and healthier lives, and will reduce the risk that they transmit HIV to others”, says **Zsuzsanna Jakab, WHO Regional Director for Europe**. “While we are not at the end of the HIV epidemic in Europe; our goal of halting and reversing the spread of HIV by 2015 is still achievable in many countries”. To support work towards that goal, WHO recently published new [consolidated guidelines](#) on the use of antiretroviral drugs to treat and prevent HIV infection.

Both Directors agree that the joint surveillance report provides valuable evidence of the need for accelerated action against HIV across the Region.

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Notes to editors

World AIDS Day was introduced by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1988 and is observed annually on 1 December to raise awareness of the AIDS pandemic caused by HIV infection.

HIV/AIDS

The human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a virus, which attacks the immune system and causes a lifelong severe illness with a long incubation period. The end-stage of the untreated infection, acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), results from the destruction of the immune system. AIDS is defined by the presence of one or more "opportunistic" illnesses (other illnesses due to decreased immunity).

The WHO European Region comprises 53 countries, with a population of nearly 900 million people, of which around 508 million live in the **EU/EEA** (28 EU Member States plus Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway).

ECDC HIV testing guidance

The ECDC HIV testing guidance aims to inform existing national HIV testing strategies in Member States to adopt a strategic, evidence-based approach to develop and implement effective HIV testing procedures.

New WHO guidelines to increase treatment coverage

The new guidelines call on all countries to initiate treatment in adults living with HIV when their CD4 cell count falls to 500 cells/mm³ or less – when their immune systems are still strong. The 2010's WHO guidelines recommended offering treatment at 350 CD4 cells/mm³ or less. Implementation of the new guidelines will result in more people receiving ART in the Region, especially in the Eastern part where ART coverage rates are lower. Increasing the number of people on ART will lead to a reduction in AIDS-related mortality and will prevent further transmission of HIV infection.

LINKS

[ECDC-WHO report HIV/AIDS surveillance in Europe 2011 \(from 27 November 2013\)](#)

ECDC resources:

[ECDC HIV testing guidance](#)

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

[More information on HIV/AIDS](#)

WHO resources:

[Press release - WHO issues new HIV recommendations calling for earlier treatment](#)

[European Action Plan for HIV/AIDS 2012-2015](#)

[HIV/AIDS country profiles 2011](#)

[HIV/AIDS](#)

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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 Member States.