AIDS in Latin America and the Caribbean

Interagency Coalition on AIDS and Development
Coalition interagence sida et développement

1Nicholas Street, Suite 726 Ottawa ON K1N 7B7
Telephone: (613) 233-7440 • Fax: (613) 233-8361
E-mail: info@icad-cisd.com • Web: www.icad.cisd.com

The People Infected

As of the end of 2002, the Joint United Nations Programme on AIDS (UNAIDS) and the World Health Organization estimate that there are 1.9 million persons living with HIV/AIDS in Latin America and the Caribbean. In 2001, over 100,000 people died of AIDS and there were 210,000 new infections. HIV infection in the region is concentrated mainly in populations living on the social and economic margins of society. Some countries in the Caribbean are experiencing the worst rates of infection outside Africa.

Profile of the Epidemic

- **In Latin America, HIV continues to spread** through a mix of injection drug use, male-to-male sex, and sex between men and women. The transmission of HIV through the sharing of injection drug equipment is a growing problem in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay, Bermuda, Puerto Rico and the northern parts of Mexico. Among men who have sex with men, a seven-country study in Central America showed HIV prevalence rates between 8% and 18%. Other studies found that prevalence in this population ranged from 14% in Lima, Peru, to 20% in Bogatà, Columbia and 28% in Guataquil, Ecuador. Almost three-quarters of the AIDS cases in Central America are the result of sex between men and women.
- **The epidemic in the Caribbean is fuelled primarily by heterosexual sex.** Haiti, with an HIV prevalence rate over 6%, is the worst affected country. The prevalence rate is 3.5% in the Bahamas and 2.5% in the Dominican Republic.
- **Twelve countries in the region, including the Dominican Republic,** have an estimated prevalence rate among pregnant women of 1% or more. However, in the Dominican Republic, there is some indication that HIV prevalence among pregnant women has begun to stablize or even decline. There is evidence of increased condom use among female sex workers and a reduction in the number of sexual partners among men.
- **Over the past decade, the ratio of men with HIV to women with HIV has narrowed considerably** - to about 3-to-1 in Latin America and 2-to-1 in the Caribbean. Paradoxically, men who have sex with men have contributed to this trend; studies have shown that a large proportion of these men also have sex with women.
- **A study in three urban prisons in Honduras** revealed HIV prevalence rates of almost 7% among male prisoners. The rate was almost 5% among male prisoners aged 16-20. Less than 10% of the men reported regular condom use.
- **In Brazil,** HIV prevalence among injection drug users in several large cities has declined substantially, thanks to prevention programs. Condom use among drug users went up from 42% in 1999 to 65% in 2000. Argentina, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay are also developing harm reduction initiatives for these populations.
- **Most countries in the region have implemented prevention programs** targeting men who have sex with men, but the quality of these programs varies, and the programs are impeded by discriminatory laws on homosexuality. Brazil has developed specific initiatives aimed at countering the vulnerability, stigma and discrimination experienced by this community.

ICAD's aim is to lessen the impact of HIV/AIDS in resource-poor communities and countries. We are a coalition of Canadian international development organizations, AIDS service organizations and other interested organizations and individuals. Funding for this publication was provided by Health Canada.

The views expressed herein are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy of the Minister of Health. *Most of the information in this fact sheet is taken from information released by the United Nations Joint Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the World Health Organization for World AIDS Day 2002. Additional copies of this fact sheet are available on the ICAD website at www.icad-cisd.com. Le feuillet "Le sida en Amérique latine dans la Caraïbe" est disponible en français.*

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