

AIDS - New Zealand

AIDS AND HIV INFECTION IN NEW ZEALAND TO END OF SEPTEMBER 1999

In the third quarter of 1999, there were 13 notifications of AIDS (10 male and 3 female), and 25 people (18 male and 7 female) were found to be infected with HIV. To the end of September 1999, in total 694 people (657 male and 37 female) have been notified with AIDS, and 1396 people (1217 male, 160 female, and 19 sex not stated) have been found to be infected with HIV

THE GLOBAL EPIDEMIC OF HIV/AIDS AND BORDER CONTROL

New estimates from the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and the World Health Organization (WHO), are that 32.4 million adults and 1.2 million children will be living with HIV by the end of 1999. [AIDS epidemic update: December 1999 epidemic. UNAIDS/WHO. November 1999].

As shown in Table 1, the epidemic has taken different forms in different parts of the world. In some areas HIV spread rapidly throughout

the population. In others it became entrenched within certain groups whose behaviour carried a particular risk of acquiring or spreading the virus.

The marked variation between regions and countries has meant that some countries have considered restrictions of entry on the basis of HIV status. Indeed, early in November this year, the New Zealand Cabinet approved new immigration procedures requiring all applicants for residence in New Zealand, including "genuine refugee status seekers", to be tested for HIV infection. Whilst the change was

Table 1 World regional HIV statistics and features, December 1999

Region	Adults and children living with HIV infection	Adult prevalence rate*	Main mode(s) of transmission for adults in region
Sub-Saharan Africa	23.3 million	8.0%	Heterosexual
North Africa & Middle East	220 000	0.13%	IDU†, Heterosexual
South & South-East Asia	6 million	0.69%	Heterosexual
East Asia & Pacific	530 000	0.068%	IDU, Heterosexual, MSM‡
Latin America	1.3 million	0.57%	MSM, IDU, Heterosexual
Caribbean	360 000	1.96%	Heterosexual, MSM
Eastern Europe & Central Asia	360 000	0.14%	IDU, MSM
Western Europe	520 000	0.25%	MSM, IDU
North America	920 000	0.56%	MSM, IDU, Heterosexual
Australia & New Zealand	12 000	0.1%	MSM, IDU
TOTAL	33.6 million	1.1%	

* The proportion of adults (15 to 49 years of age) living with HIV/AIDS in 1999, using 1998 population numbers

† Injecting drug users

‡ Men who have sex with men

“aimed at protecting the health of all New Zealanders” it is unlikely to have any major effect on the spread of HIV within New Zealand.

Back in 1987 the World Health Organization concluded that travel and migration restrictions related to AIDS were “ineffective as a public health measure, impractical, and wasteful” and that at best they would “briefly retard” the entry of HIV infection into areas with a low prevalence but at great cost.

[Duckett M, Orkin A. HIV and travel. *BMJ* 1990;300:1676] Since that time there has been no reason to change these conclusions, and continued improvements in access to travel have made such restrictions even less practical.

The direct costs to the health service of HIV infected migrants are of course significant. However in the United States the use of economic arguments as a basis for the rational exclusion of HIV-infected migrants has been questioned. This is particularly because HIV-infected people may remain economically productive for many years and the positive aspects of immigration had previously been under-estimated. [Fairchild AL, Tynan EA. Policies of containment: Immigration in the era of AIDS. *Am J Public Health* 1994;84:2011-22]

People diagnosed with HIV in New Zealand and country of infection

The available New Zealand information on where people were infected with HIV has been reviewed to assess the possible effect of excluding infected migrants, and others who intend to work and study in New Zealand for two years or more, on the heterosexual spread of HIV within New Zealand.

Since the start of 1996, 320 people have been diagnosed with HIV in this country. Of these, 116 (36.3%) were reported to have been infected in this country, 171 (53.4%) overseas and for 33 (10.3%) this information was either not known or not reported. Of those infected overseas, a quarter (25.3%) were men who had sex with men and 62.3% were heterosexually infected.

Those infected overseas include New Zealanders living or travelling there as well as people from other countries. Although information on the nationality of people diagnosed with HIV infection is not collected, their ethnicity is.

Since 1996, 16 people of European, Maori or Pacific ethnicity were diagnosed with HIV infection that was heterosexually acquired overseas. The majority (9) of these infections occurred in those Africa and Asian countries where there is a relatively high prevalence of HIV.

In the same period 15 people of European, Maori or Pacific ethnicity were diagnosed with HIV that was heterosexually acquired in New Zealand. Only 4 of these infections were reported to have occurred through contact with people from high prevalence areas. The immigration status of the people who transmitted the infection is not known, although none were known to have been refugees.

Since 1996 there appear to have been more New Zealanders who have been heterosexually infected with HIV in high prevalence areas, than have been infected in New Zealand by people from such parts of the world.

It is therefore likely that more infections would be prevented among New Zealanders by their understanding the risks of unprotected sex in a variety of situations and avoiding this, rather than testing and excluding people from overseas. In fact, the latter could lead to more unsafe sex in New Zealand if people erroneously believed that the prevalence had dropped markedly because of the testing policy.

Human rights issues and HIV/AIDS

Because of concern about the widespread abuse of human rights and fundamental freedoms associated with the epidemic throughout the world, the United Nations Commission on Human Rights convened the

Second Consultation on HIV/AIDS and Human Rights in 1996.

This meeting affirmed the basic human right to "seek and enjoy asylum". It criticised countries for using public health grounds for infringing this right.

A similar stance has also been taken by other international organisations. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees has stated that there is no justification for screening to be used to exclude HIV-infected people from being granted asylum. [UNHCR Health policy on AIDS, 15 February 1988 (UNHCR/IDM)]

AIDS AND HIV INFECTIONS IN NEW ZEALAND IN THE THIRD QUARTER OF 1999

AIDS

The AIDS Epidemiology Group received 13 notifications of people with AIDS in the third quarter of 1999.

Of the 10 males notified, 9 were reported to have had sex with men, and one to have been heterosexually infected. The latter had had multiple sexual partners including high-risk partners overseas. All 3 females notified were reported heterosexually infected. One of these women was believed to have been infected in North America and the others were from high prevalence areas.

Nearly half (4/9) of the men notified with AIDS in the most recent quarter whose HIV-infection was diagnosed at the time or soon before AIDS, were aged 50 or older. In the 12 months to the end of September 1999, over a quarter of people notified with AIDS were over the age of 50.

HIV infection

The Group has been informed of 25 people found to be infected with HIV in the third quarter of 1999. Of these, 18 were male and 7 were female.

Of the 18 males found to be infected in the third quarter of 1999, so far information has been obtained on 17. Of these 17, 11 were reported to have had sex with men, 2 to have been heterosexually infected overseas and for 4 men the means of infection had not been determined. Both of the men heterosexually infected were from parts of the world where there is a high prevalence of HIV among the heterosexual population, as were 3 of the 4 men whose means of infection was reported as being not known.

Information has so far been obtained on 6 of the 7 females found to be infected. Of these 6, 4 were reported heterosexually infected. One of these women was reported infected in New Zealand, one in North America and the other 2 in Africa. The way that the sexual partner of the woman infected in New Zealand was infected was not known at the time the report was made. Both the other women about whom information has been received were from high prevalence areas. One of these women was reported infected through a contaminated blood transfusion and for the other the means of infection was reported as unknown.

EXPOSURE CATEGORIES AND ETHNICITY OF PEOPLE NOTIFIED WITH AIDS AND FOUND TO BE INFECTED WITH HIV

Information on the categories of risk, sex and ethnicity, of the 694 people notified as having AIDS and the 1396 people diagnosed with HIV in New Zealand to the end of September 1999 is shown in Tables 2 and 3 (overleaf).

Table 2 Exposure category by time of notification of people with AIDS, and by time of diagnosis for those found to be infected with HIV. A small number of transsexuals are included with the males.

Exposure category	Sex	AIDS				HIV Infection*			
		12 months to 30.9.99		Total to 30.9.99		12 months to 30.9.99		Total to 30.9.99	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Homosexual contact	Male	22	64.7	555	80.0	34	43.0	747	53.5
Homosexual contact & IDU	Male	0	0.0	10	1.4	0	0.0	13	0.9
Heterosexual contact	Male	4	11.8	35	5.0	13	16.5	98	7.0
	Female	5	14.7	27	3.9	16	20.3	113	8.1
Injecting drug use (IDU)	Male	2	5.9	12	1.7	0	0.0	31	2.2
	Female	0	0.0	5	0.7	0	0.0	8	0.6
Blood product recipient	Male	0	0.0	15	2.2	0	0.0	29	2.1
Transfusion recipient	Male	0	0.0	1	0.1	1†	1.3	4	0.3
	Female	0	0.0	1	0.1	0	0.0	6	0.4
	NS	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	0.4
Perinatal	Male	0	0.0	1	0.1	1	1.3	6	0.4
	Female	0	0.0	2	0.3	1	1.3	4	0.3
Awaiting information/ undetermined	Male	1	2.9	28	4.0	11	13.9	287	20.6
	Female	0	0.0	2	0.3	2	2.5	25	1.8
	NS	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	14	1.0
Other	Male	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	0.1
	Female	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	0.3
TOTAL		34	100.0	694	100.0	79	100.0	1396	100

NS = Not stated

*Includes people who have developed AIDS

†Acquired overseas

Table 3 Ethnicity by time of notification for people with AIDS, and by time of diagnosis for those found to be infected with HIV. Information on ethnicity of people found to be infected with HIV is only available since 1996. A small number of transsexuals are included with the males.

Ethnicity	Sex	AIDS				HIV Infection*			
		12 months to 30.9.99		Total to 30.9.99		12 months to 30.9.99		1.1.96 to 30.9.99	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
European/Pakeha	Male	20	58.8	531	76.5	34	43.0	138	43.1
	Female	2	5.9	22	3.2	3	3.8	14	4.4
Maori †	Male	3	8.8	74	10.7	1	1.3	17	5.3
	Female	0	0.0	1	0.1	1	1.3	3	0.9
Pacific Island	Male	1	2.9	15	2.2	1	1.3	3	0.9
	Female	0	0.0	3	0.4	0	0.0	3	0.9
Other	Male	5	14.7	30	4.3	21	26.6	78	24.4
	Female	3	8.8	11	1.6	14	17.7	49	15.3
Awaiting information/ undetermined	Male	0	0.0	7	1.0	3	3.8	13	4.1
	Female	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.3	2	0.6
TOTAL		34	100.0	694	100.0	79	100.0	320	100.0

NS = Not stated

* Includes people who have developed AIDS

† Includes people who belong to Maori and another ethnic group

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