

Technical Reports

WHO announces 50% decline in poliomyelitis cases worldwide

The number of reported cases of paralytic poliomyelitis has decreased by more than 50% since 1985, according to information made available at the Eighty-ninth session of the World Health Organization (WHO) Executive Board, which opened on 20 January 1992 in Geneva. Official reports for 1990 submitted by 171 out of 195 countries gave a total of 16398 cases. Compared with the 33833 cases reported in 1985 this is a 52% reduction and compared with the 57777 cases reported in 1981 a 72% reduction.

This decrease in the number of cases of poliomyelitis is attributable to the tremendous improvement in immunization services seen throughout the world since WHO's Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) commenced in 1974. Addressing the WHO Executive Board, Dr. Robert Kim-Farley, Director of EPI, said that with the cooperation of WHO, UNICEF and other organizations of the United Nations system, other intergovernmental organizations, Rotary International and other non-governmental organizations, Member States were able to immunize a global average of 85% of infants with three doses of oral polio vaccine in 1990.

Seventy-six percent (76%) of reported cases came from two countries, India (7340 cases, 45%) and China (5065 cases, 31%). India experienced a 66% decline in the number of cases from 1988 when

21408 cases were reported. China experienced major outbreaks of poliomyelitis in 1989 and 1990. The greatest decline in the number of reported cases in 1990 came from the Philippines: 85 cases were reported, a decline of 94% from the 1422 cases reported in 1988.

Cited for excellence was the poliomyelitis eradication initiative in the Region of the Americas. With the use of intensive immunization campaigns, the number of confirmed poliomyelitis cases reported in North, South and Central America and the Caribbean Islands fell by 97% – from 721 in 1985 to 18 in 1990.

There is particular concern about poliomyelitis control in 14 African countries where fewer than half the children are fully immunized against poliomyelitis.

Noting that 116 countries reported no poliomyelitis cases in 1990, Dr. Kim-Farley, Director of EPI, said, "The World Health Organization has pledged to eradicate poliomyelitis from the world by the year 2000. We expect more and more countries to become poliomyelitis free with each passing year". WHO estimates that, as a result of immunization, more than 400000 children were spared the crippling effects of poliomyelitis in 1990.

World Health Organization, Geneva

AIDS – over a million new infections in eight months

The latest World Health Organization (WHO) report charting the global spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic indicates that over a million people worldwide have been newly infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) since April 1991, when the previous report was issued.

About nine-tenths of the new infections have been in adults and one-tenth in children born to HIV-infected mothers. Of the newly infected adults, slightly over one-half live in sub-Saharan Africa, almost one-quarter live in Asia and the Pacific (the vast majority in South and South-East Asia), and close to one-sixth in Latin America. The vast majority of paediatric infections are in sub-Saharan Africa, where over 3 million women have become infected since the start of the pandemic. Developing countries, thus, account for over 90% of all new infections.

Worldwide, well over 90% of the newly infected adults acquired their infection from heterosexual intercourse (intercourse between men and women). This reflects the continuing trend toward heterosexual transmission of the virus, seen not only in

developing countries but, increasingly, in the industrialized world.

The report issued today shows that at least 9–11 million adults and about 1 million children, or at least 10–12 million people in all, are estimated to have become infected with HIV worldwide since the beginning of the pandemic.

WHO estimates that close to 1.5 million of these adults have reached the late stage of HIV infection known as AIDS. In addition, WHO believes that there have been more than 500000 cases of AIDS among HIV-infected children, bringing the total to about 2 million cases worldwide. This cumulative total represents an increase of about half a million AIDS cases since April 1991. Because it takes 10 years on average for an HIV-infected adult to develop AIDS, most cases are being seen in regions where the pandemic first became established, namely North America, sub-Saharan Africa and Western Europe.

The rise in AIDS cases since April 1991 foreshadows what will be an increasing trend throughout this decade and beyond, as the millions of