

## 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

Worldwide HIV infections in adults, early 1992

Area	Number of adult infections
North America	1 000 000
Latin America (Caribbean, Central and South America)	more than 1 000 000
Western Europe	500 000
North Africa and the Middle East	50 000
South and South-East Asia	more than 1 000 000
Sub-Saharan Africa	more than 6 500 000
Australasia	30 000
Eastern Europe and for former Soviet Union	20 000
East Asia and the Pacific	20 000
	approx. 10 120 000

people already infected with HIV progress from asymptomatic infection to HIV-related illness and, ultimately, to AIDS.

For the year 2000, WHO maintains its projection that the cumulative total of HIV infections in men, women and children will range between 30 and 40 million. In other words, WHO estimates that infections will at best triple and at worst quadruple in just 8 years' time.

"In absolute numbers, this is a wide range – 30 million as opposed to 40 million people", said Dr. Michael H. Merson, Director of WHO's Global Programme on AIDS. "It means that aggressive prevention campaigns can make a real difference in the ultimate size of the pandemic. If we seize this opportunity, millions of people may be spared infection by the year 2000."

Increasingly, the brunt of the pandemic is being borne by the developing world, which already accounts for more than 80% of all HIV infections and is expected to hold over 90% by the year 2000. The distribution of AIDS cases will follow the same pattern, with a 10-year lag.

In sub-Saharan Africa, a conservative estimate of the number of adults infected with HIV since the start of the pandemic is over 6.5 million, including close to 1 million who have already developed AIDS. The cumulative total for adults in Latin America and the Caribbean is now estimated at over 1 million HIV infections.

There is mounting apprehension over the growing pandemic in South and South-East Asia, where it is now estimated that at least 1 million adults have become infected serious concern that the virus may be spreading at a pace reminiscent of sub-Saharan Africa in the early 1980s. With more than twice as many adults as sub-Saharan Africa, South and South-East Asia have an even bigger potential for epidemic spread.

Although only limited data from North Africa and the Middle East are available to WHO, they suggest that extensive spread of HIV has begun in some parts of the region. Approximately 1000 cases of AIDS and more than 3000 HIV infections have now been officially reported. According to WHO estimates, there may have been about 50 000 HIV infections in this region since the start of the pandemic.

In the industrialized countries of Australasia, North America and Western Europe, WHO estimates that 1.6 million HIV infections have occurred, including some 350 000 AIDS cases. While the rate of new infections has decreased markedly since the mid-1980s in homosexual men, there remains a potential for explosive HIV spread among groups of injecting drug users, and infection rates are continuing to increase in heterosexual women and men.

World Health Organization, Geneva

## L'Opération Nez rouge: Un «modèle» de prévention populaire

La prévention, c'est l'affaire de tous, entend-on dire de plus en plus souvent. A l'opposé, d'aucuns annoncent la mort du bénévolat, tué par l'omniprésence de l'état-providence dans l'action médico-sociale. Cette dernière impression semble nettement infirmée par l'engagement enthousiaste des bénévoles dans les premières éditions de l'Opération Nez rouge, menée en hiver 90/91 et 91/92 dans le canton du Jura; les quelques 250 personnes qui y ont participé considèrent bien que

la prévention c'est leur affaire; ce d'autant plus que l'humour et la convivialité venaient s'ajouter au plaisir de mener une action de prévention sur un thème aussi important que la conduite d'un véhicule avec facultés affaiblies; la force de la simplicité et la clarté du message sont des atouts non négligeables de cette action.

Pour ces raisons, nous présentons ce «modèle» (au sens «neutre» du terme) de prévention, populaire par l'impact dans la population touchée (et