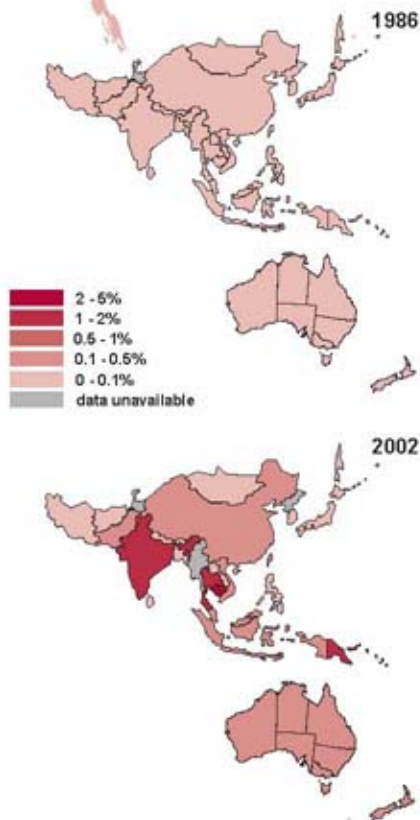


02 THE HIV/AIDS SITUATION IN ASIA

Adult (age 15-49) HIV prevalence rate in Asia-Pacific



UNAIDS (2002) A global view of HIV infection

Asia and the Pacific are home to an estimated 7.4 million people living with HIV/AIDS, including the 1 million adults and children who were newly infected in 2003. In the past years, the situation has deteriorated rapidly in parts of the region.

The current situation

The maps on the left show clearly that no country in Asia and the Pacific is immune to HIV/AIDS.

Countries such as Thailand and Cambodia have reported high HIV/AIDS prevalence since the early 90s whereas in China and Indonesia the epidemic has just recently started to emerge from the shadows with several serious local epidemics.

In 2003, almost 1,500 people in Asia and the Pacific died from AIDS every single day, adding up to over 500,000 AIDS deaths per year. At the same time, almost 3,000 people get infected with HIV every day. This means that the Asia Pacific region sees more than one million new infections every year.

The HIV/AIDS epidemic can spread very quickly. Low HIV prevalence rates in the general population can conceal serious epidemics in high-risk groups. Examples of high-risk groups in Asia are adolescents and youth, sex workers and their clients, drug users, men who have sex with men, mobile populations, street children, etc. These groups are more vulnerable and thus more at risk of becoming infected with HIV. Very often, the HIV prevalence is much higher in these groups than in the general population. In China, certain areas have prevalence rates higher than 70% among injecting drug users.

- In Asia, almost 3,000 people get infected every day
- Around 25 million people could be infected in Asia by 2010 if prevention is not scaled up
- The epidemic can be curbed if appropriate prevention programmes are put into place

As has happened in Thailand, Cambodia, and Myanmar, the epidemic can quickly cross over from high-risk groups to the general population. Injecting drug users, men who have sex with men, and clients of sex workers may, knowingly or unknowingly, pass the virus on to their sex partners and children.

Mobile populations and HIV/AIDS:

Migration and mobility play important roles in the context of HIV/AIDS – some mobile populations are particularly at risk.

- **Migrant workers**, who leave their families behind, tend to engage in high-risk activities and, as a result, contract HIV more than the general population. Thus, sex partners of migrant workers also are very much at risk of getting infected.
- Among **mobile professions**, such as truck drivers, for example, prevalence rates may reach 50 per cent or more.
- **Migrant and trafficked sex workers** are considerably more likely to be HIV-infected than other people.

Projections of the future

Projection models have shown that an additional 18.5 million people will be infected with HIV in South and Southeast Asia by 2010 if prevention is not scaled up. Recent estimates project that, if prevention is not scaled up or programmes are not successful, China alone will have 10 to 15 million HIV/AIDS cases, and India is likely to have 20 to 25 million by 2010.

Nevertheless, immediate intervention could avert a large number of future infections and thus the course of the AIDS epidemic could be reversed. Comprehensive prevention packages would reduce the number of new infections in the region by 69 per cent, i.e. that only 5.7 million people instead of 18.5 million would be newly infected by 2010.

The Asia-Pacific region is seriously affected, with the potential for rapid spread if action is not taken.

paragraph 10, UNGASS declaration of Commitment on HIV/AIDS, 2001

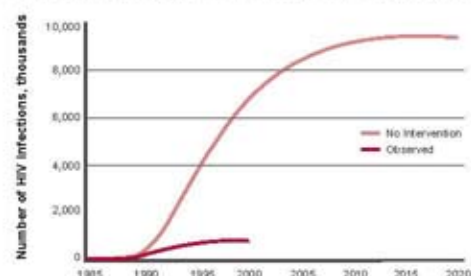
The epidemic can be curbed through an appropriate response

There is evidence that prevention programmes are successful and that the epidemic can be curbed.

Countries such as Thailand and Cambodia serve as good regional examples that the HIV epidemic can be curbed by strong and focused campaigns before it becomes too big. Thailand's well-funded, politically supported and comprehensive prevention programmes have saved millions of lives, reducing the number of new HIV infections from 143,000 in 1991 to 29,000 in 2001.

The graph below shows the actual growth of the epidemic and the estimated scenario in Thailand, had there been no interventions.

Scenario of the epidemic in Thailand, had there been no intervention through 2020, and observed epidemic curve



Source: Division of AIDS, Ministry of Public Health in Thailand, Thai Working Group on HIV/AIDS Projection (2001) HIV/AIDS Projections of Thailand 2000 - 2020