

Assessing the pandemic

38.0 million adults and 2.3 million children were living with HIV at the end of 2005. This is more than 50% higher than the figures projected by WHO in 1991 on the basis of the data then available.

During 2005, some 4.9 million people became infected with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), which causes AIDS.

The year also saw 3.1 million deaths from AIDS - a high global total, despite antiretroviral (ARV) therapy, which reduced AIDS-related deaths among those who received it. Deaths among those already infected will continue to increase for some years even if

poverty, exploitation and themselves becoming infected with HIV.

In 2005, an estimated 700,000 children aged 14 or younger became infected with HIV. Over 90% of newly infected children are babies born to HIV-positive women, who acquire the virus at birth or through their mother's breast milk. Almost nine-tenths of such transmissions occur in sub-Saharan Africa. Africa's lead in mother-to-child transmission of HIV is firmer than ever despite the evidence that HIV ultimately impairs women's fertility; once infected, a woman can be expected to bear 20% fewer children than she

World estimates of the HIV & AIDS epidemics at the end of 2005

		Estimate*	Range*
Number of people living with HIV/AIDS in 2005	Total	40.3	36.7-45.3
	Adults	38.0	34.5-42.6
	Women	17.5	16.2-19.3
	Children	2.3	2.1-2.8
People newly infected with HIV in 2005	Total	4.9	4.3-6.6
	Adults	4.2	3.6-5.8
	Children	0.70	0.63-0.82
AIDS deaths in 2005	Total	3.1	2.8-3.6
	Adults	2.6	2.3-2.9
	Children	0.57	0.51-0.67
			* millions

prevention programmes manage to cut the number of new infections to zero. However, with the HIV-positive population still expanding the annual number of AIDS deaths can be expected to increase for many years, unless more effective provision of ARV medication begins to slow the death rate.

Around half of the people who acquire HIV become infected before they turn 25 and typically die of the life-threatening illnesses called AIDS before their 35th birthday. This age factor makes AIDS uniquely threatening to children. By the end of 2003, the epidemic had left behind 15 million AIDS orphans, defined as those having lost one or both parents to AIDS before reaching the age of 18. These orphans are vulnerable to

otherwise would. Drugs are available to minimise the dangers of mother-to-child HIV transmission, but these are still often not reaching the places where they are most needed.

The overwhelming majority of people with HIV, some 95% of the global total, live in the developing world. The total number of people living with HIV continues to rise in high-income countries, largely due to widespread access to ARV treatment, which prolongs the lives of HIV+ people. This increases the pool of HIV+ people who are able to transmit the virus onwards. It is estimated that 1.2 million people are living with HIV in North America and 720,000 in Western and Central Europe.

In the two regions, AIDS claimed approximately 30,000 lives in 2005, although the rate of AIDS-related deaths has been cut substantially through use of ARV medicines. ■

Sources

- UNAIDS/WHO AIDS epidemic update, December 2005
- UNAIDS/WHO 2004 Report on the global AIDS epidemic

People living with HIV- 40.3 mn (36.7-45.3 mn)
 New HIV Infections in 2005- 4.9 mn (4.3-6.6 mn)
 Deaths due to AIDS in 2005- 3.1 mn (2.8-3.6 mn)
 Source: UNAIDS/WHO AIDS epidemic update: December 2005