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UNPROTECTED SEX HAS NO AGE LIMIT: THE UNEXPLORED STORY OF HIV AND AGEING

Many people may be becoming infected with HIV at advanced ages

GENEVA – The number of older people (50 years of age and older) with HIV may be increasing worldwide, but doctors seldom consider screening them for HIV so diagnosis is often delayed, according to an article published in the *Bulletin* today. At the same time, these individuals are less likely to practise safe sex and, once they are diagnosed, the older the individual, the faster the progression from HIV infection to AIDS.

Case reporting in the United States of America shows an increase in the proportion of HIV-positive individuals aged 50 years or older from 20% in 2003 to 25% in 2006, according to one of the article's authors, Dr George Schmid, a scientist from WHO's Department of HIV/AIDS. And, preliminary analysis of data from countries in the developing world reveal a surprisingly high proportion of infected individuals in this age group. This frequency of infection is particularly surprising because life expectancy after diagnosis, which is more than 13 years in people infected at age 5–14, declines to 4 years in those infected at age 65 or older.

While antiretroviral therapy, which extends the lifespan of people with HIV, may be helping to increase the numbers of older individuals with HIV, scientists also suspect many are becoming infected at advancing ages. "The frequency of infection with HIV in older people is worrying. We need to understand why and when these people are becoming infected so that public health campaigns can be better targeted to prevent such infections," says Dr Schmid.

In the same issue of the *Bulletin*, Claudia Jurberg reports from Brazil on a campaign aimed at people aged more than 50 years to make them more aware of the risks of becoming infected with HIV. "In Brazil, there is a great deal of prejudice related to sexuality and age," says Ivo Brito, a technical adviser for the Brazilian programme for Sexually Transmitted Diseases and AIDS at the Ministry of Health. "Many people do not think the elderly are sexually active; they regard AIDS as a disease of young people."

Read the article here:

<http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/87/3/09-064030.pdf>

Read the news feature here:

<http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/87/3/09-010309.pdf>

The *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* is an international journal of public health with a special focus on developing countries. It is one of the world's leading public health journals and the flagship periodical of the World Health Organization.

Further items in this *Bulletin* issue include:

- On a mission to mate, but not to breed. Genetically modified mosquitoes may soon join the fight against dengue.
- Deficiencies in the way childbirth is managed are highlighted in a new study.
- Self-poisoning using pesticides costs the health-care system in Sri Lanka.
- Making medicines for children more accessible.
- Who pays for hospital errors in the United States of America? A recent change sparks debate.
- Screening for those at high risk of oral cancer is recommended in India.
- Interview: with Dr Mohammed R Al Kashif on coordination of health facilities across the Gaza Strip in January. Interview: with Teddy Boen, from Indonesia, and Tony Gibbs, from Barbados and Grenada, on how to build health-care facilities to withstand disasters.
- Improving tuberculosis case detection in Kenya.
- Vaccinating children in Pakistan's mountain regions to reduce the risk of pneumonia.

The *Bulletin's* table of contents can be found at:

<http://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/87/3/en/index.html>

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