

## Latin America

### Overview

- Although patterns of the HIV epidemics in some Latin American countries are changing, the epidemics in this region overall remain stable, with new HIV infections totalling around 140 000, and some 65 000 people dying of AIDS-related illnesses in 2006.
- Two thirds of the estimated 1.7 million people living with HIV in Latin America reside in the four largest countries: **Brazil**, **Mexico**, **Colombia**, and **Argentina**.
- However, estimated HIV prevalence is highest in the smaller countries of Central America; just under 1% in **El Salvador**, **Guatemala** and **Panama**, 1.5% in **Honduras** and 2.5% in **Belize** in 2005.
- HIV transmission is occurring in the context of factors common to most of Latin America; widespread poverty and migration; insufficient information about epidemic trends outside major urban areas; and homophobia.
- Unprotected sex between men accounts for as much as 25%-35% of reported cases of HIV in countries such as **Argentina**, **Bolivia**, **Brazil**, **Guatemala** and **Peru**.
- HIV infection levels among female sex workers are widely varied. HIV prevalence is very low in some South American countries, such as **Chile** and **Venezuela**, but prevalence rates of between 2.8% and 6.3% have been found among sex workers in cities in **Argentina**, and 6% prevalence has been reported in parts of **Brazil**.

### Country developments

- **Brazil** was home to 620 000 people living with HIV in 2005, one third of all people living with the virus in Latin America.
- While the percentage of young people who are sexually active in **Brazil** changed little between 1998 and 2005, condom use rates increased dramatically—by more than one third among 15-24 year-old men and women. Among Brazilians of all ages, condom use increased by almost 50% during the same period.
- Unprotected sex between men remains a significant factor in HIV transmission and accounts for nearly half of the sexually-transmitted HIV infections in **Brazil** with women being increasingly infected.
- It is estimated that one third of adults in **Brazil** has been tested for HIV (the majority of them women aged 25-39 years), and that about one in three Brazilians infected with HIV is aware of his or her HIV status.
- In **Brazil**, provision of antiretroviral therapy is among the most comprehensive in the world, and is yielding positive results. Nationally, mother-to-child transmission of HIV declined substantially, from 16% in 1997 to less than 4% in 2002. AIDS mortality rates

decreased by 50% between 1996 and 2002, while AIDS-related hospitalizations fell by 80% during the same period.

- In **Argentina**, national adult HIV prevalence was an estimated 0.6% in 2005. Most of the estimated 130 000 people living with HIV are in the provinces of Buenos Aires, Cordoba and Santa Fe. In various studies up to 44% of people who inject drugs, 7%-15% of men who have sex with men, and 6% of female sex workers have been found to be living with HIV. As much as one quarter (28%) of inmates in some city prisons has tested HIV-positive. Due to a combination of factors (including the maturation of the epidemic and the effects of the 2001 economic crisis), unprotected sex has in recent years been the main mode of HIV transmission.
- Approximately 9600 people were living with HIV at the end of 2005 in **Uruguay**, where unprotected sex (mostly heterosexual) is the main route of HIV transmission. Nevertheless, infection levels are high among certain groups in the capital Montevideo; 22% among men who have sex with men; 19% among people who inject drugs and 10% among non-injecting drug users. At least half of the people in **Uruguay** needing antiretroviral treatment were receiving it by mid-2006.
- In **Paraguay** about 13 000 people were living with HIV at the end of 2005. Men comprise the majority of HIV cases (74%), with exposure to contaminated drug injecting equipment and unprotected sex between men being the main modes of HIV transmission.
- Unprotected sex, especially between men, is the main risk factor for HIV infection in **Chile**; where about 28 000 people were living with HIV at the end of 2005. Increasing numbers of women are acquiring HIV, many from male partners who acquired the virus during unprotected sex with other men.
- In **Peru**, HIV appears to be mainly affecting men who have sex with men. HIV prevalence in that population group is high—10% in Iquitos and its surrounding area, and an average of 14% in six other cities, including the capital, Lima, where up to 23% of men who have sex with men have tested positive for HIV.
- Sex between men is also the main risk factor for HIV infection in the other Andean countries, including in **Bolivia** (HIV prevalence of 24% has been found in Santa Cruz among men who have sex with men), **Ecuador** (HIV prevalence of 28% in Guayaquil and 15% in Quito) and **Colombia** (HIV prevalence of 20% in Bogotá). In none of these three countries does HIV prevalence exceed 4% among female sex workers, and it is well under 1% in several cities.
- **Mexico's** large population means that despite low adult national HIV prevalence—estimated at 0.3%—around 180 000 people were living with HIV in 2005. **Mexico's** epidemic is concentrated primarily among men who have sex with men, sex workers and their clients, and people who inject drugs. Sex between men is believed to account for more than half (57%) the HIV infections recorded to date.

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