

## AIDS Eradication

### Why in News?

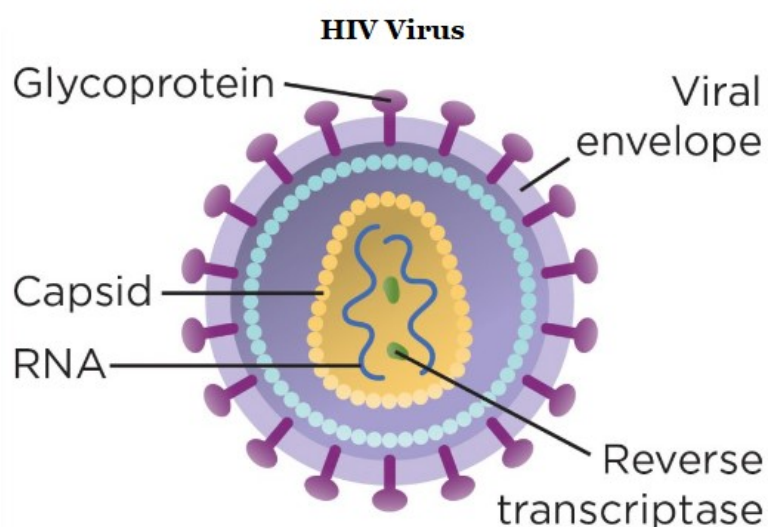
New HIV cases down in India by 44% since 2010.

### What is AIDS?

- **Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS)** - It is a chronic condition caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and the final and most serious stage of an HIV infection.

*First cases of HIV AIDS were detected in the 1980s.*

- **HIV Virus** - It is a lentivirus, which is a sub-classification of the retrovirus.



- It attacks the body's immune system, particularly white blood cells called CD4 cells.

*CD4 cells also known as CD4 T lymphocytes or "helper T cells" help fight infection by triggering immune system to destroy viruses, bacteria, and other germs.*

- **Transmission** - Sexual contact, transfer of bodily fluids such as through infected needles, blood transfusions and from mother to child at birth.
- **High Risk Populations** - Persons who inject drugs have a 35 times greater risk of acquiring HIV than adults who do not.

- Men who have sex with men (MSM) have a 28 times greater risk of acquiring HIV than other adult men (aged 15–49).
- Transwomen have a higher risk (14 times) than adult women (aged 15–49).
- Female sex workers are at 30 times greater risk adult women (aged 15–49).
- **Prevention of transmission** - AIDS transmission can be prevented by use of condoms during sex, using sterilised needles and not reusing needles and testing bloods before transfer.
- **HIV Treatments** - There is no Vaccine for AIDS and no direct drug to cure AIDS but can be treated to control the associated illness.
- **Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)** - It is a pill that has 2 anti-HIV medicines taken daily to prevent HIV for HIV-negative people.
  - PrEP Drugs - Truvada, Descovy, and Apretude
- It is taken before you think you might be exposed to HIV.
- **PEP** - This medicine prevents HIV after potential exposure.
- It is taken within 72 hours after exposure to HIV (e.g. after rape) for 28 days to prevent HIV.
- **Antiretroviral Therapy (ART)** - It is a 3-medicine treatment for HIV-positive people that reduces the levels of HIV in a person's body.
- ART helps the body stay strong and helps it fight off infections and other illnesses.

*The first antiretroviral drug, AZT (zidovudine), was approved by the US Food and Drug Administration (US FDA) in March 1987.*

- **Protease inhibitors** - It is a new class of antiretroviral drugs introduced in 1995 and they prevent a virus from making more copies of itself.
- **Therapy** - HAART Therapy (Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy), and 'cocktail therapy' combining three or more anti-retroviral drugs, became available starting in 1996.
- **Recent developments in Treatment**
  - New PrEP Drugs - Lenacapavir and Descovy F/TAF
  - Stem Cell Treatment - Recently a HIV patient got cured of AIDS following a stem cell transplant.

### **What is the AIDS situation at Global and India level?**

- **Global Status** - As of 2022, **39 million** people globally were living with HIV.
  - **New infection** - **1.3 million** (Decreased by 39%)
- **India Status** - The number of People Living with HIV (PLHIV) in India is estimated at around **24 lakhs**.
  - **Share of India in Global level** - 6.3% (around 10% two decades ago).
  - **New infections** - Around 66,400 (Decreased by 44%).
  - **Adult HIV prevalence** - 0.2 per cent
- **High prevalent region** - The north-east region States have the highest adult HIV prevalence (2.70% in Mizoram, 1.36% in Nagaland and 1.05% in Manipur).
- It is followed by southern States (0.67% in Andhra Pradesh, 0.47% in Telangana and 0.46% in Karnataka).

- **India's Progress** - As of the end of 2023
  - 82% knew their HIV status
  - 72% were on ART
  - 68% were virally suppressed.
- **Decline in Mortality** - AIDS-related deaths have been reduced by 69% since the peak in 2004.

### How India has achieved this progress?

- **Prevention and Control** - National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) was launched in 1992 for prevention and control of HIV/AIDS in India and implemented by National AIDS Control Organisation.
- 5<sup>th</sup> phase of the National AIDS and STD Control Programme (2021-2026) seeks to reduce
  - Annual new HIV infections by 80%
  - AIDS-related mortalities by 80%
  - Eliminate vertical transmission of HIV and syphilis— by 2025.
- **Diagnosis** - Comprehensive HIV and syphilis testing to all pregnant women
- More than 30 million free HIV tests being conducted annually.
- More than 1.7 million people are receiving free antiretroviral therapy (ART) through public healthcare systems
- **Treatment** - Free **Antiretroviral Therapy (ART)** was launched for Persons living with HIV (PLHIV) on April 1, 2004.
- 1,264 Link ART centres make free ART drugs available to approximately 1.8 million PLHIV on treatment.
- Due to the introduction of the ART programme and other measures, in 2023, the prevalence of HIV in 15-49 age group came down to 0.20.
- **Comorbidities management** - Efforts to tackle tuberculosis, viral hepatitis, and non-communicable diseases, is helping address co-morbidities faced by people living with HIV.
- **Awareness Creation** - Youth-targeted initiatives like Red Ribbon Clubs in educational institutions.
- Mass-awareness activities such as the annual RED RUN Marathon.
- Indian Health Service observes **National HIV Testing Day on June 27**, to highlight the importance of testing for and detecting HIV infection.
- **De stigmatization** - HIV and AIDS (Prevention and Control) Act 2017 provides for ombudsmen to handle grievances and promote HIV prevention policies.
- **Universal Coverage** - National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI) is a seven-year programme (2017-24) to attain universal coverage of HIV prevention, treatment.

### What are the global initiatives against AIDS?

- **UNAIDS** - Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS was created in 1996 co-sponsored by eleven United Nations agencies.
- **UN General Assembly's Millennium Summit 2000** - World leaders issued a declaration to stop and reverse the spread of HIV.

- In 2015, countries achieved the targets envisaged under Millenium Development Goal 6A — to halt and reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS.
- Target 6B of MDG -It sought to achieve universal access to treatment for HIV/AIDS for all those who need it by 2010.
- **Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria** - It promotes universal access to HIV prevention, treatment and care in 2002.
- **WHO 2024 AIDS Clinical Module** - The module integrates clinical service delivery guidance for all 3 WHO recommended PrEP products that is oral PrEP, the dipivefrine vaginal ring and long acting injectable cabotegravir.
- **Stigma Index** - The People living with HIV Stigma Index is a tool designed to gather evidence about how discrimination and stigma affects the lives of those living with HIV.
- It was developed by the Global Network of People Living with HIV (GNP+), ICW, UNAIDS and International Planned Parenthood Foundation (IPPF).
- **SDG Target** - United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 3 aims at ending HIV/AIDS as a public health threat by 2030.
- **Let Communities Lead** - In 2023, UNAIDS released this report, highlighting community participation in efforts to end the AIDS epidemic.
- **UNAIDS 10-10-10 target** - Pathways to Achieving the Global 10-10-10 HIV Targets was released by UNDP
  - Less than 10% of countries would have punitive legal and policy environments that deny or limit access to services.
  - Less than 10% of people living with HIV and key populations would experience stigma and discrimination
  - Less than 10% of women, girls people living with HIV, and key populations would experience gender inequality and violence
- **95-95-95 Target by 2025**
  - 95% of all people living with HIV know their HIV status.
  - 95% of all people diagnosed with HIV infection receive sustained antiretroviral therapy (ART).
  - 95% of all people receiving antiretroviral therapy achieve viral suppression by 2025.
- **UNAIDS New Sustainability approach** - In 2024, UNAIDS proposed a new approach to ensure a sustained HIV response beyond 2030.
- **SCALE Initiative** -It is a UNDP-led partnership to accelerate the removal of structural barriers to HIV services and drive progress on the historic 10-10-10 HIV targets through population-led efforts.
- It is currently funding 45 key population-led organizations across 21 countries for a total of more than US\$1.5 million.
- **AIDS Conference** - 25th International AIDS Conference is held in 2024 in Munich bringing together scientists, policy makers, healthcare professionals, people living with HIV, funders, media and communities.

### What are the challenges in AIDS control?

- **Lack of awareness** - More than 40% of people living with HIV still do not know they are infected.

- **Difficult medication** - Daily PrEP regimen is challenging to maintain due to social and structural reasons.
- **Costly Treatments** - Costs, of the antiretroviral therapies remained prohibitively high about \$10,000 a year.
- **Stigma** - Self stigmatization and social stigmatization prevents the participation of PLHIV from getting treatment.
- **Exclusion** - Feelings of shame and guilt were often based upon experiences of social exclusion.
- **Drug resistance** - At least 5% of people on ART were resistant to at least 1 antiretroviral drug.
- **Drug shortage** - Some people living with HIV have had their regimen changed due to the unavailability of certain ARVs.

### What lies ahead?

- Use Stigma Index to understand the level of stigmatization prevalent in the society and take appropriate measures to address it.
- Provide psychological counselling and therapy, and psychiatric intervention to support persons living with HIV.
- Create treatment programmes to reach people who may be reluctant to come forward.
- Make community leadership central to the formulation, budgeting, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of all plans, policies and programmes that will affect communities.
- Fully and sustainably fund communities' leadership roles so that programmes can be scaled up, and the people implementing them can be properly supported and remunerated.

### References

1. [The Hindu | New HIV cases down in India](#)
2. [The Hindu | HIV/AIDS: Key interventions and progress](#)