

The AIDS Epidemic and Prospects for Control

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The AIDS virus, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV), has already spread extensively, infecting about 70 million individuals worldwide. Yet, the epidemic continues to worsen in developing countries, particularly in Africa and, more recently, in Asia. Each day approximately 12,000 individuals become newly infected by HIV, including 1000 children. About 100 million cases are expected by the end of a decade. In certain regions of Africa, it is not unusual to find about a third of the adult population affected by the virus, and AIDS can account for up to 90% of the death in young adults. The social and economic impact of the epidemic is simply devastating for the severely affected countries. HIV infection is now spreading the fastest in Asia. India already has approximately 4-5 million cases, most of which were acquired in only the past few years. Much of Southeast Asia is already severely affected, including the well-known situation in Thailand. Of great concern is the rapid spread of HIV in China. Initially restricted to the Yunnan Province due to the close contact at the Burmese border, HIV is now found diffusely throughout the country, with an estimate of 640,000 infections. A major contributing factor was a unsanitary blood collection practice in the province of Henan and its neighboring provinces that led to many infections in China. With the large populations in India, Southeast Asia and China, a critical battle line with HIV must be drawn in this region. The epidemic cannot be allowed to continue to spread like wild fire.