



# California Drug Counseling

## Rates of HIV infection drop in a few nations

A United Nations count of HIV infections around the world topped 40.3 million this year, but there are signs that rates may be starting to decline in a few hard-hit regions -- a small, hopeful sign in the 25-year battle against the disease.

For the first time in a decade, the U.N. affiliate that tracks the epidemic reported continuous reductions in the number of people living with the virus in a handful of countries in the Caribbean and Africa.

"We are encouraged by the gains that have been made in some countries and by the fact that sustained HIV prevention programs have played a key part in bringing down infections," said Dr. Peter Piot, executive director of the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS, or UNAIDS.

The agency's report provides a yearly benchmark of the global progress -- or lack of it -- against the disease, which has killed more than 25 million people since

it was discovered in 1981. This year, 4.9 million people were infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, and 3.1 million died of that disease.

The recital of grim statistics was tempered by reports that, at least in some corners of the world, AIDS prevention efforts might be working.

"We are finally, after almost 10 years, seeing additional countries showing declines of national HIV prevalence," Dr. Paul De Lay, director of evaluation at UNAIDS, said in a telephone press conference.

In sub-Saharan Africa, 25.8 million people are living with HIV infection -- an increase of 3.6 percent from 2003. But the report finds that infection rates among adults in Kenya have fallen to 7 percent from 10 percent in the 1990s.

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## Alkermes alcoholism drug wins tentative OK

A much-anticipated alcoholism drug made by Cambridge biotechnology company Alkermes Inc. won conditional approval from federal regulators on December 27th, potentially paving the way for it to be made available early 2006.

The drug, Vivitrol, would be the first injection approved to treat alcoholics. Tests have shown the medication, taken once a month, can reduce heavy drinking in patients who are also in counseling.

In an "approvable letter" issued yesterday, the Food and Drug Administration said

Alkermes needed to provide more scientific data and finish negotiating the wording of the drug's label.

In a statement yesterday, Alkermes chief executive Richard Pops said the letter is a "positive step."

"We look forward to working diligently with the FDA to gain final approval and bring forward Vivitrol as an important new medication for the treatment of alcohol dependence," he said.

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### Special points of interest:

- AIDS has killed more than 25 million people since its discovery in 1981.
- For each additional dollar spent per capita on alcohol advertising in a particular media market, people drank 3 percent more per month.

## Alcohol ads boost drinking among young

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According to researchers, young adults as well as teenagers drink more under the influence of advertising for alcoholic beverages.

A survey of young people aged 15 to 26 found that for each additional alcohol advertisement viewed per month, there followed a 1 percent rise in the average number of drinks consumed, said study author Leslie Snyder of the University of Connecticut in Storrs.

The study's findings counter industry arguments that only adult drinkers heed alcohol advertising, Snyder wrote in the

journal *Archives of Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine*.

In the study -- released around the New Year's holiday that is often associated with toasts and excessive imbibing -- the researchers conducted four rounds of interviews between 1999 and 2001 with a group of young people, with the initial 1,872 subjects selected randomly.

Another finding was that for each additional dollar spent per capita on alcohol advertising in a particular media market, study participants drank 3 percent more per month.

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## HIV Infection Drops in a few Nations

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"Significant numbers of Kenyans in recent years have adopted safer sexual behavior," the report said. For example, condom use among women with casual partners rose to 24 percent from 15 percent in 1998.

Zimbabwe, racked by political strife and economic collapse, also appears on the UNAIDS list of improved results: The percentage of adults believed to be infected by HIV there has fallen since 2002 from 26 percent to 21 percent. Agency officials attribute the decline to high rates of condom use in casual sexual partnerships.

Lower infection rates in some Caribbean nations kept the overall rate of HIV prevalence stable in that region, where 1.6 percent of adults are living with HIV or have progressed to AIDS. This is particularly heartening, because no other region of the world outside sub-Saharan Africa has been hit as hard by

AIDS.

In urban areas of Haiti in 2003 and 2004, for example, the percentage of pregnant women testing positive for HIV has decreased to 3.7 percent from 9 percent a decade earlier.

"Haiti's epidemic, one of the oldest in the world, could be turning a corner," the UNAIDS report concluded.

In the Dominican Republic -- on the eastern half of Hispaniola, the island it shares with Haiti -- epidemiologists have found HIV infection rates among pregnant women declined during the 1990s and have reached a stable rate of 1.4 percent, lower than in many other poor countries.

In both countries, the lower infection rates coincide with statistics showing improved measures of HIV prevention. One survey in Haiti, for example, showed men and women were

more likely today than in 1994 to either abstain from sex or have sex with only one partner; in the Dominican Republic, a study shows 87 percent of prostitutes reporting they used a condom the last time they had sex.

Richard Feachem, executive director of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, said the overall picture painted by the report is mixed. "It confirms that investment in AIDS works but that we are seriously under-investing," he said.

The U.N.-inspired Global Fund has set a target of \$7.1 billion to spend on programs for the three diseases in 2006-07 but has received pledges from wealthy nations of only \$3.8 billion so far.

For every piece of good news about AIDS, the virus has a way of casting a cloud. As encouraging as Haiti's data may be, there are also indications of rising rates of unsafe sex among younger Haitians. Surveys are showing decreased rates of sexual abstinence among Haitian teens; that they are having sex at an earlier age and are less likely to use condoms than teens did in the mid-1990s.

Uganda's much-heralded success in driving HIV infection rates down a decade ago also may be waning. A recent Uganda survey has found that 7 percent of adults there were HIV positive -- up from an estimate of 6.2 percent in 2003. "Despite the admirable achievements in prevention, treatment and care in the past decade, Uganda has not overcome its epidemic," the report said.

World attention on AIDS tends to focus on Africa -- where 3.2 million people are newly infected every year -- but the fastest rates of HIV infection are occurring in Eastern Europe, primarily in the nations of the old Soviet Union.

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## Alcoholism drug wins OK

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Alkermes hopes to turn Vivitrol into the first widespread drug to treat alcoholism. It is based on an existing medicine, naltrexone, which is believed to dampen the powerful "high" that pushes alcoholics toward their next drink.

By making the drug a monthly injection instead of a daily pill, Alkermes says, the chances for successful therapy are increased, because alcoholics will not be tempted to stop taking their pills.

Tests have shown that Vivitrol injections helped patients decrease the number of "heavy drinking days" per month.

The drug also has less drastic side effects than at least one other alcoholism drug, which causes nausea if a patient has contact with alcohol.

The drug was formerly called Vivitrex. The name was changed during the FDA review.

Cephalon Inc., which is co-marketing Vivitrol, said yesterday that it expects the drug to be launched in the first half of next year.

Vivitrol could provide a dramatic boost for Alkermes. Analysts have predicted the drug could eventually bring in as much as \$300 million a year, which would make the company profitable for the first time in its 19-year history.

But it will face challenges. While doctors increasingly view alcoholism as a clinical disease rather than a behavioral problem, it is only rarely treated with prescription drugs. Alkermes has been attempting to build networks of therapists and doctors, so alcoholics in treatment also have access to a prescriber and are thus more likely to receive the drug.

According to the company, the FDA needs to see data proving the slow-release version of naltrexone works similarly to the version delivered in pills, which has been on the market for years.

It also needs to finalize the drug's label, which could be complicated. Oral naltrexone includes a warning for possible liver damage, which may reduce the number of prescriptions doctors write. The company would not comment yesterday on whether the warning was an issue in negotiations over the label.

A spokesman for Alkermes said there were no specific deadlines for providing the information the FDA requested.

Ian Sanderson, a biotechnology analyst for SG Cowen & Co., said the issues the FDA outlined seemed manageable.

"It's disappointing -- I was expecting a full approval," Sanderson said, "but it sounds to me like it's a relatively minor issue to be resolved."

*SOURCE: The Boston Globe  
By: Stephen Heuser*

## Alcohol Ads

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In markets with heavy alcohol advertising of more than \$10 per capita per month, alcohol consumption increased over time and reached a peak of 50 drinks per month by age 25.

The study measured advertising exposure on each of four media: television, radio, magazines and billboards.

"The results also contradict claims that advertising is unrelated to youth drinking amounts: that advertising at best causes brand switching, only affects those older than the legal drinking age or is effectively countered by current educational efforts," Snyder wrote.

**"For each additional alcohol advertisement viewed per month, there followed a 1 percent rise in the average number of drinks consumed," said study author Leslie Snyder.**

In an editorial in the journal, David Jernigan of Georgetown University in Washington said the study was the first of its kind to link young people's alcohol use directly to objective measures of industry spending on advertising.

The study "calls into question the industry's argument that its roughly \$1.8 billion in measured media expenditures per year have no impact on underage drinking," he wrote.

Snyder doubted whether the industry was heeding voluntary guidelines that

70 percent of the audience for its advertising be at least 21 years old, the legal drinking age.

*SOURCE: Yahoo! News*



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*California Drug Counseling education and counseling center provides a variety of services including behavior modification, HIV/AIDS prevention and Medical drug/alcohol counseling, Prop 36 counseling, tutoring, mentoring, sex education counseling, parenting and other counseling services.*

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*The Fresh Start office provides  
placement counseling and job  
assistance for ex-offenders.*

*The Fresh Start office is  
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## HIV infection Drops in a few Nations

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Since 2003, the number of adults and children living with HIV in Eastern Europe and Central Asia has risen to 1.6 million from 1.2 million -- part of a 20-fold increase in the past 10 years.

Drug users who share contaminated needles are driving the epidemic in those areas, where it is also spreading among their sex partners. In the Russian Federation alone, UNAIDS estimates 860,000 people are living with AIDS. The U.N. report also raised alarm about infection rates among injection drug users in Indonesia and Pakistan, where HIV rates are steadily climbing.

In India and China, the world's two most populous nations, even small increases in the percentage of the population infected with HIV translate into huge numbers. In India, statisticians show a widely diverse epidemic reflecting the diversity of the

country itself. More than 5 million are believed to be living with HIV or AIDS.

HIV has been detected in half of China's provinces, and the report said the country has made slow progress in fulfilling its pledge made in 2003 to provide free antiviral drugs to all who need them.

Worldwide, nearly 1 million poor people are benefiting from antiviral drugs, 250,000 of them in sub-Saharan Africa. The World Health Organization's Dr. Jim Kim, who set a goal of 3 million people to be treated with antiviral drugs by then end of this year, said the goal won't be met but that the drugs are saving many lives.

Kim said that the UNAIDS estimate that 5 million new HIV infections are occurring each year shows "we are really failing in our efforts to prevent this epidemic in most parts of the world."

*SOURCE: The San Francisco Chronicle*