

THREE NORTHEASTERN STATES EMERGE AS NEW HIV HOTSPOTS

Relevant for: Health, Education & Human Resources | Topic: Health & Sanitation and related issues

The good news is that there has been a steady decline in the number of HIV cases in India. The bad news is that Meghalaya, Mizoram and Tripura have emerged as the new hotspots for HIV, according to the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare.

Lok Sabha reply

In response to a question in the Lok Sabha on Friday, the Ministry attributed the reason for the rise in the incidence of HIV in the three northeastern States to the high-risk behaviour of Injecting Drug Users (IDUs), and unsafe sexual practices.

In four sites in Mizoram and one in Tripura, HIV prevalence was higher among IDUs, which for the rest of the country is 6.3%. At least in three places at Aizwal, Champhai and Kolasib, the prevalence of HIV in IDUs was 37.44%, 33.06% and 38.14% respectively.

HIV prevalence among female sex workers was higher at four sites — two in Tripura and one each in Mizoram and Meghalaya. At one site of Mizoram's Aizwal district, the prevalence of HIV was as high as 24.68%, compared with 1.6% for other sites in the country.

In the case of pregnant women visiting ante-natal clinics (ANC), six centres in Mizoram, two in Meghalaya and one in Tripura recorded HIV prevalence of more than 1%, compared with HIV prevalence of 0.28% among pregnant women visiting ANCs in other places in India surveyed in December 2017.

The HIV Sentinel Surveillance (HSS), a biennial study conducted by the National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO), is one of the largest regular studies in the world dealing with HIV in high risk groups of the population.

The HSS had referred that HIV prevalence in the context of ANCs in the northeastern States of Mizoram (1.19%), Nagaland (0.82%), Meghalaya (0.73%), Tripura (0.56%) and Manipur (0.47%) were among the highest.

Samiran Panda, Director of the National AIDS Research Institute (NARI), said that the discussion on HIV prevalence has to be taken to the districts. "We need prevention and intervention strategies for the most-at-risk population in these pockets, with good coverage," Dr. Panda said.

In terms of persons living with HIV (PLHIV) who are on Anti-Retroviral Treatment (ART), Dr. Panda said that almost 12.28 lakh people are covered under ART. According to him, the target is to bring 90% of the 21 lakh people living with the HIV infection in India under ART.

"Going by that target, we are still short of about 6 lakh patients. The challenge is to encourage more people to take the test and then provide them with ART," he said.

ART's efficacy

Interestingly, ART leads to effectively suppressing the virus and reducing the transmission of HIV from the infected person, Dr. Panda said.

In terms of PLHIV who are on ART, Maharashtra has the highest number (with 2.03 lakh persons) followed by A.P.(1.78 lakh) and Karnataka (1.58 lakh persons).

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