

The HIV/AIDS Epidemic in the Caribbean

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The HIV/AIDS epidemic has had a profound impact on the Caribbean region, the second-most affected region in the world, after sub-Saharan Africa, and the most affected in the Americas.^{1,2,3} AIDS is the leading cause of death among 15-44 year-olds in the region.² The epidemic varies significantly across the region's countries and by population, reflecting the Caribbean's cultural, ethnic, and geographic diversity. Eight of 9 countries in the region³ have HIV/AIDS adult prevalence rates (the percent of people living with HIV/AIDS) of at least 1%; Haiti has the highest rate of any country in the world outside of sub-Saharan Africa.² Women are increasingly affected, comprising more than half of those living with HIV/AIDS.¹ Young people—especially young women—are at particular risk.^{1,4,5,6} Factors that exacerbate HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean and complicate the region's response to the epidemic include poverty, unemployment, stigma, discrimination, and gender inequalities.^{1,6,7} In addition, studies indicate that the epidemic poses serious development and economic challenges to the region.^{6,7} Despite these challenges, there have been success stories, and even hopeful signs—some Caribbean countries are seeing declines in prevalence and incidence.¹ Most Caribbean nations have developed national responses to HIV/AIDS through National AIDS Commissions, strategic plans, legislation, programs, services, and participation in regional networks.^{7,8}

Figure 1

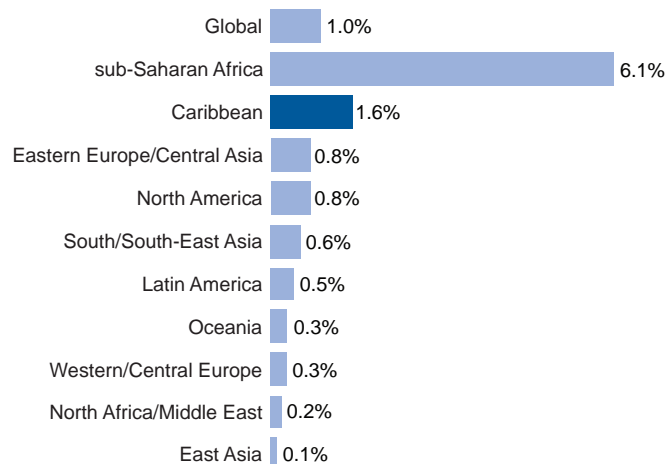
Snapshot of the HIV/AIDS Epidemic in the Caribbean, 2005¹

People Living with HIV/AIDS: 330,000
New HIV Infections: 37,000
Deaths due to AIDS: 27,000



Figure 2

Percent of Adults Estimated to be Living with HIV Disease by Region, 2005^{1,10}



Overview

- The Caribbean's first case of what was later identified as AIDS was officially recorded in Jamaica in 1982.⁹
- As of the end of 2005, an estimated 330,000 people were living with HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean.¹
- The HIV/AIDS prevalence rate in the region (1.6% as of the end of 2005) is second only to sub-Saharan Africa and higher than the global prevalence rate (1.0%).^{1,10}
- There were an estimated 37,000 new infections in the region in 2005 and 27,000 deaths.¹ AIDS is the Caribbean's leading cause of death among those ages 15-44.^{1,2}
- HIV is spread primarily through heterosexual sex in the Caribbean, with commercial sex playing a large role in many places, although transmission patterns vary across the region and within countries.¹ While sex between men is also an important factor in HIV transmission in some parts of the region, stigma and discrimination make it difficult to assess the extent of its role and to reach those at risk.^{1,6,7} Injection drug use plays a small role in transmission in most countries in the region, with the exception of Bermuda and Puerto Rico, where transmission via injection drug use contributes significantly to the spread of HIV.¹
- There are signs of potential stabilization of the epidemic and/or reductions in prevalence and new infections in some parts of the region (the Bahamas, Barbados, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Jamaica).¹

Populations Affected

- The Caribbean's HIV/AIDS epidemic is increasingly female. Women account for more than half of adults (ages 15 and over) estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS.¹ The impact on women is even more pronounced in some countries within the region (in Guyana, women represent 60% of adults living with HIV/AIDS).¹
- Young people are at particular risk. Approximately one-third of people¹⁰ living with HIV/AIDS in the region are between the ages of 15 and 24.^{4,5} Young women are especially vulnerable with those ages 15-24 comprising more than two-thirds (69%) of all young people estimated to be living with HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean.⁵ Some country-level studies within the region have found infection rates among young women 2 to 6 times higher than their male counterparts.^{1,6}
- There are approximately 22,000 children¹¹ living with HIV/AIDS in the region.¹²

Other Key Data and Information

- **Social Issues:** The stigma attached to HIV/AIDS, the discrimination faced by men who have sex with men, and gender inequalities remain obstacles to HIV/AIDS prevention, treatment, and surveillance efforts in the region.^{1,6,7}
- **Access to Prevention:** Recent estimates indicate that there is a gap in access to prevention services in the larger Latin American and Caribbean region.¹³
- **Access to Antiretroviral Therapy (ART):** ART access varies greatly across the Caribbean. While Cuba provides universal, free access to ART to its citizens living with HIV/AIDS and coverage is relatively high in the Bahamas and Barbados, access in other Caribbean countries is poor.¹ Overall, less than a quarter (23%) of persons in the Caribbean in need of antiretroviral therapy were receiving it in 2005.¹ Belize, Guyana, and Haiti have each been identified by the World Health Organization (WHO) as “3 by 5” focus countries due to their need for technical support and resources to scale up ART.¹⁴

International Support/Major Donors

- Numerous donor governments provide funding and other support to address HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean including Canada, the European Union, Germany, the United States, and the United Kingdom.^{7,8} The U.S. President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), provides bilateral funding to the Caribbean through regional and individual country efforts.^{15,16} In addition, 2 of the 15 countries designated by PEPFAR as “focus” countries are in the Caribbean—Guyana and Haiti.¹⁷ U.S. bilateral aid for these 2 countries was \$71 million in FY2005.¹⁸ The U.S. also provides funding for HIV/AIDS efforts around the world through its contributions to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria (The Global Fund).
- The Global Fund has approved HIV/AIDS grants in 7 countries in the Caribbean (Belize, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, and Suriname) and 3 multi-country HIV/AIDS grants through the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), the Caribbean Regional Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (CRN+), and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS), totaling \$176 million in approved funding for country and regional grants.¹⁹
- UNAIDS and its 10 co-sponsors support numerous HIV/AIDS programs, partnerships, and other activities throughout the Caribbean.^{8,20} One of the largest is the World Bank’s Multi-Country HIV/AIDS Program (MAP) for the Caribbean, launched in 2001, through which the Bank has approved \$155 million to help finance the implementation of HIV/AIDS prevention and control programs in individual countries and for regional efforts.²¹

Figure 3

Women as a Share of Adults (ages 15 and over) Living with HIV/AIDS by Region, 2005¹

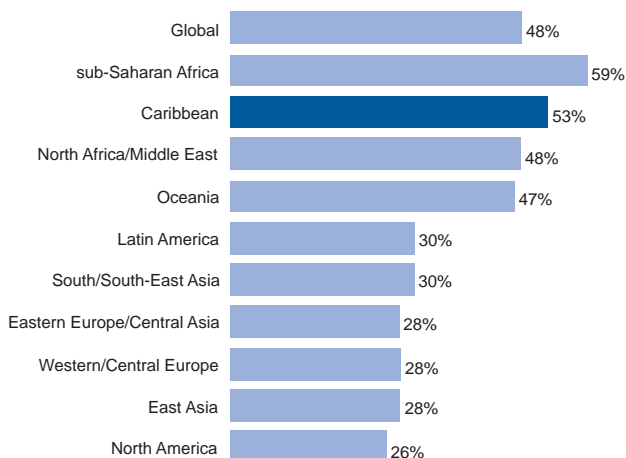
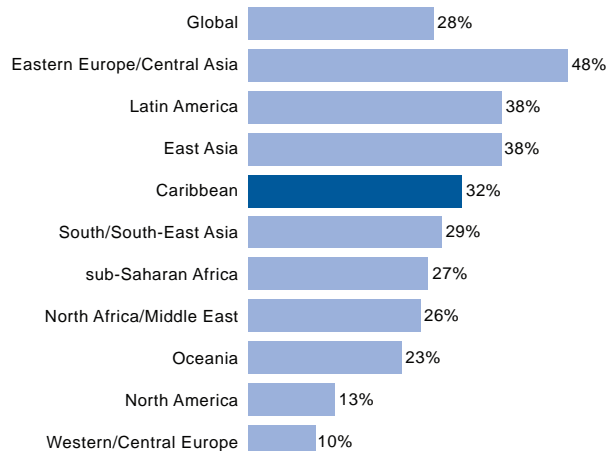


Figure 4

Young People (Ages 15-24) as a Share of People Living with HIV/AIDS by Region, 2003^{4,5,10}



Key Sources/Websites

- Caribbean Epidemiology Centre (CAREC): <http://www.carec.org/>.
- Caribbean Regional Network of People Living with HIV/AIDS (CRN+): <http://www.crnplus.org/>.
- Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), AIDS and STI Page: <http://www.paho.org/english/ad/fch/ai/aids.htm>.
- Pan Caribbean Partnership Against HIV/AIDS (PANCAP): <http://www.pancap.org/>.
- UNAIDS Caribbean Regional Page: http://www.unaids.org/en/Regions_Countries/Regions/Caribbean.asp.
- World Bank, HIV/AIDS in Latin America and the Caribbean Page: www.worldbank.org/lac/aids.
- Broadcast HIV Carib: www.broadcasthivcarib.org.

References

- 1 UNAIDS, *2006 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic*, May 2006.
- 2 UNAIDS, “Caribbean,” Fact Sheet, May 2006.
- 3 UNAIDS reports HIV/AIDS data for the following Caribbean countries: Bahamas, Barbados, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago. There are regional networks with varying membership in the Caribbean—the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM) has 15 member states and the larger Pan Caribbean Partnership Against HIV/AIDS (PANCAP) region has 29 country and territorial members.
- 4 UNAIDS, *2004 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic*, July 2004.
- 5 Kaiser Family Foundation, *The Global Impact of HIV/AIDS on Youth*, Fact Sheet, July 2004.
- 6 UNAIDS/CARICOM, *A Study of the Pan Caribbean Partnership Against HIV/AIDS (PANCAP): Common Goals, Shared Responses*, December 2004.
- 7 CARICOM/PANCAP, *The Caribbean Regional Strategic Framework for HIV/AIDS 2002-2006*, March 2002.
- 8 UNAIDS, *UNAIDS at Country-Level: Progress Report*, 2004.
- 9 CAREC, *CAREC Surveillance Report Supplement*, Vol. 23, Supplement 1, October 2003.
- 10 Among adults ages ages of 15-49.
- 11 Under age 15.
- 12 UNAIDS, “Core slides: Global summary of the HIV and AIDS epidemic, 2005,” *2006 Report on the Global AIDS Epidemic*, May 2006.
- 13 Global HIV Prevention Working Group, *Access to HIV Prevention: Closing the Gap*, May 2003.
- 14 WHO/UNAIDS, *Progress on Global Access to HIV Antiretroviral Therapy: A Report on “3 by 5 and Beyond,”* March 2006.
- 15 DHHS/CDC, “Global AIDS Program, Program Profile – Caribbean Region FY 2004.”
- 16 USAID, “Caribbean Region HIV/AIDS Country Profile,” December 2004.
- 17 U.S. Department of State, Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator: www.state.gov/s/gac.
- 18 U.S. Department of State, Office of the U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator, *Action Today, A Foundation for Tomorrow: The President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief Second Annual Report to Congress*, February 2006.
- 19 The Global Fund: www.theglobalfund.org.
- 20 UNAIDS: www.unaids.org.
- 21 World Bank, “HIV/AIDS in Latin America and the Caribbean,” Updated November 2005.