

## The Stigma Associated with HIV

### Why in news?

Drugs have been developed against HIV but stigma is still high and in some areas of the world the prevention strategies are hindered.

### What is AIDS?

- Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS) is a chronic, potentially life-threatening condition that damages the immune system.
- **Cause** - Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)
- It attacks cells that help the body fight infection, making a person more vulnerable to other infections and diseases.
- **Spread** - It can spread through sexual contact, illicit injection drug use or sharing needles, contact with infected blood, or from mother to child during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding.
- **Treatment** - There is no vaccine to prevent HIV infection and no cure for HIV/AIDS.

### What is the stigma associated with HIV?

*UN report-2022 reported that more than 1.5 million people had become infected with HIV in 2021, around three times the global target.*

- **Fear of judgement** - Sometimes, people avoid testing out because of fear of judgment and being discriminated if they got tested.
- **AIDS crisis** - Certain public health campaigns that emerged in the 1980s in response to the AIDS crisis are still deeply indulged in people's perceptions of the virus across the globe.
- **Issue in rural areas** - If woman comes from a tight-knit rural area for treatment the news of her positive status can spread fast among family and community members.
- **Misconception on sex** - The community will think that the sexual activity of that infected woman is all over the place and that's why they need treatment.
- **Reflection on the family** - In Kenya, **children's HIV status** could impair access to education because they will question the motherhood of the child's mom.

### What are the steps taken by Indian government to eradicate AIDS?

- **National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO)** - It was delegated with the responsibility of formulating, implementing and monitoring policies of prevention and control of AIDS in the country.
- It took control of the National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) implementation for

HIV prevention.

- **The National AIDS Control Programme (NACP), 1992** - It is being implemented as a comprehensive programme for prevention and control of HIV/AIDS in India.
- It was launched to coordinate the national responses of surveillance, blood screening details and programmes of health education.
- **Mass media campaigns** - NACO has been conducting regular thematic mass media campaigns on TV and radio regarding the spread and treatment.
- **National Strategic Plan on HIV/AIDS and Sexually Transmitted Infection (STI)** - It is a seven year programme (2017-24), which aims to attain universal coverage of HIV prevention, treatment to care continuum of services for people living with HIV.
- **Free Anti-retroviral therapy (ART)** - India is attempting free roll out of ART under the **test and treat strategy** to achieve the second 90 of the 90-90-90 treatment target, which aimed that, 90% of all people with diagnosed HIV infection will receive sustained ART.
- **Bilateral and multilateral partners** - A number of international organisations are working with the NACO in addressing HIV/AIDS issue by contributing their technical expertise and financial resources.

*SDG Target 3.3 - End the epidemics of AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and neglected tropical diseases and combat hepatitis, water-borne diseases and other communicable diseases by 2030*

## **What are the challenges in eradicating AIDS?**

### **Across countries**

- **Croatia** - Treatment is available for free in Croatia only for people with insurance and not for those, such as undocumented migrants who do not have insurance.
- There is only one HIV treatment center in Croatia, thus posing difficulty in accessing care.
- **Thailand** - In some Thai provinces, it can take up to a day to get to a facility that treats the condition.
- Religion also impacts how HIV is perceived in the Buddhist tradition, the virus is often seen as bad karma, a sign of bad actions in a past life.
- **Kenya** - People are suspicious about taking pills for prevention on taking PrEP.

*PrEP is a preventative medication for at-risk groups that, if taken correctly, can reduce a person's chances of getting the virus through sex by up to 99%.*

## **What lies ahead?**

- **ART** - The treatment for HIV is a combination of drugs taken daily called antiretroviral therapy (ART).
- There is a need to increase the access of ART usage worldwide as it has been very successful at lowering HIV mortality rates.

- **Daily oral medication** - Another preventative treatment is the PrEP, a daily oral medication that is highly effective if taken correctly.
- **Nullout the stigmas** - All countries have to work on the stigmas of people to nullify certain myths and increase the awareness among all the classes of people.

## Quick Facts

### 90-90-90 target

- The idea behind the 90-90-90 target is to
  - diagnose 90% of people who are HIV positive
  - get 90% of the diagnosed HIV+ people on antiretroviral treatment
  - 90% of those on antiretroviral should be virally suppressed

### The United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS)

- UNAIDS is the main advocate for accelerated, comprehensive and coordinated global action on the HIV/AIDS pandemic.
- It is headquartered in **Geneva, Switzerland**.
- It is a member of the United Nations Development Group.

## References

1. [The Hindu|Why HIV treatment is still undermined by stigma](#)
2. [Hiv.gov|what-are-hiv-and-aids](#)