

PRESS RELEASE

On International Women's Day UNAIDS is urging countries to stop 1 million women and girls from becoming infected with HIV every year

Nearly 1 million women are becoming infected with HIV every year and only half of all women living with HIV have access to lifesaving treatment—making AIDS now the leading cause of death worldwide among women between the ages of 30 and 49.

GENEVA, 8 March 2017—On International Women's Day UNAIDS has released a new report which shows that there is an urgent need to scale up HIV prevention and treatment services for women and girls. The report, *When women lead, change happens*, shows that globally in 2015, there were 18.6 million women and girls living with HIV, 1 million women and girls became newly infected with HIV and 470 000 women and girls died of AIDS-related illnesses.

"Women are leading change in increasing demand for and access to HIV and health services. This movement needs to grow to allow families to thrive, societies to flourish and economies to progress," said Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS. "Women's rights are human rights—no exceptions."

The report shows that women are more vulnerable to HIV than men. Domestic violence and sexual abuse have been shown to increase the risk of HIV among women. Data show that in high HIV prevalence settings women who experience intimate partner violence are up to 50% more likely to acquire HIV.

A lack of access to education and health services and a lack of decision-making power are also contributing factors to women's vulnerability to HIV. In only 30% of countries worldwide do equal numbers of girls and boys attend upper secondary school and in western and central Africa only a third of young women between the ages of 15 and 24 report having the final say in their own health care. In Botswana, every additional year of school has been shown to reduce the risk of HIV infection by 11.6% among girls.

"Structural, behavioural and biological factors are compounding the risk of HIV infection among women," said Mr Sidibé. "Every girl should have the opportunity to stay in school, every young woman should have the decision-making power over her own sexual and reproductive health and all women and girls should be able to protect themselves against HIV."

In the 2016 United Nations Political Declaration on Ending AIDS, countries committed to reducing the number of new HIV infections among adolescent girls and young women from 390 000 in 2015 to below 100 000 in 2020, to ensuring that young people have the skills, knowledge and capacity to protect themselves against HIV and to ensuring that 90% of young people in need have access to sexual and reproductive health services and combination HIV prevention options by 2020. Countries also committed to ensuring that 90% of women living with HIV know their status, 90% of women living with HIV who know their status are accessing treatment and 90% of women on treatment have suppressed viral loads by 2020. These efforts will enable countries to end AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Reaching the targets will require intensified and united efforts. Combining a range of evidence-informed health services and structural changes will be critical. These include ensuring that girls can go to school and stay in school, that punitive and discriminatory laws are reformed and that women and girls are economically and socially empowered to ensure they have full control of their sexual and reproductive health rights.

Health services also need to be integrated. Making a range of integrated sexual and reproductive health services available to young women and adolescent girls without discrimination and without the need for parental consent improves access to services for HIV and related illnesses, such as tuberculosis, hepatitis and cervical cancer.

UNAIDS is working with a broad range of partners, including governments, civil society, the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, to ensure that women and girls everywhere are empowered and enabled to protect themselves against HIV and that all women and girls living with HIV have immediate access to treatment.

For more information go to <https://womenandgirlsandaids.unaids.org/>

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The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations—UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN Women, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank—and works closely with global and national partners towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. Learn more at unaids.org and connect with us on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.