

HIV-AIDS - Children in Mexico

The first HIV-AIDS case in Mexico was reported in 1983, although, according to retrospective research conducted by the Ministry of Health (la Secretaría de Salud / SSA) and the National Center for HIV-AIDS Prevention and Control (el Centro Nacional para la Prevención y Control del VIH-SIDA / CENSIDA), the onset of the HIV epidemic can be traced back to 1981. As of that year (1983) and up to March 31, 2008, an estimated 118 624 AIDS cases have been reported¹. In 1993 the Ministry of Health (SSA) established the Official Mexican Norm for the Prevention and Control of the HIV infection, the treatment and attention that must be conducted should a zero positive case be reported.²

The following chart shows the data based on **gender and age of the HIV-AIDS carriers according to CONASIDA estimates:**

Large Age Groups	Men		Women		Total	
	Cases	%	Cases	%	Cases	%
0-14	1,534	1.6	1,300	6.4	2,834	2.4
15-44	76,785	79.0	15,495	75.8	92,280	78.5
45 or older	18,819	19.4	3,659	17.9	22,478	19.1
Unknown*	886	(0.9)	146	(0.7)	1,032	(0.9)
Total	98,024	100.0	20,600	100.0	118,624	100.0

Source:

SS/DGE. National Census for AIDS Cases. Data to March 31st, 2008

Processed: SS/CENSIDA/DIO/SMI.

Note: The calculation of percentages was excluded for the category "Unknown". However, said figure is shown in brackets to know its relevance.

Considering the total amount of reported HIV-AIDS cases, Mexico holds third place in the American continent, preceded by Brazil (2nd place) and the USA (1st place)³. However, according to the prevalence of HIV in the adult population – an indicator used by ONUSIDA for international comparisons - it is estimated that our country holds place 23 in Latin America and position 77 at a worldwide level.

¹ CONASIDA AT: <http://www.salud.gob.mx/conasida/>

² Available on the Internet at <http://www.salud.gob.mx/unidades/cdi/nom/010ssa23.html>

³ Various authors. Dos décadas de la epidemia del SIDA en México. (Two decades with the AIDS epidemic in Mexico) Pdf document. <http://www.salud.gob.mx/conasida>

⁴ Informative conference prior to the XVII International HIV-AIDS Conference. Mexico City, July 24, 2008

The disease's long incubation period, its under-registration, under-diagnosis, lack of notification are among others, factors that hinder the reception and transmission of information and therefore, the control of the population with HIV-AIDS and its statistical estimates. CENSIDA estimates that there are 380 000 people who live with HIV who are not registered and therefore have no medical treatment, orientation or advice.⁴

Children are not exempt from the negative effects, exposition and the risk of getting the disease. CONASIDA's figures reveal that the population with HIV-AIDS between 0-14 years of age, represents 2.4% of the total of the population infected by the disease. Likewise, considering gender distribution, it represents 1.6% of the male population and 6.4% of the female population, as described in the following chart:

Large Age Groups	Men		Women		Total	
	Cases	%	Cases	%	Cases	%
0-14	1,534	1.6	1,300	6.4	2,834	2.4
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The figures reveal the evident negative impact the disease continues to make at a micro and macro social level. The number of boys and girls infected by the HIV-AIDS virus does not show big differences if we analyze the absolute figures. However, if we explore each group at a deeper level (based on gender), we can observe that for the female group, the segment of 0-14 years of age – despite being the lower percentage - holds the higher value, moreover, if we consider this as an age range when girls have not started voluntary sexual activity and are in many instances victims of sexual abuse and violence.

The 2 834 cases of boys and girls who were reported suffering from HIV-AIDS to march 31st 2008, stand for 2.4% of the total population of the victims of the disease.⁵ Most of these children belong to a vulnerable group: homeless children, victims of child abuse living in poverty with no access to health services.

Other effects of HIV-AIDS in children is that as a result of the disease, many of them are forced into dropping out of school in order to look after their relatives suffering from the disease, take care of their homes or start working in order to contribute to the family income and therefore being relegated to the limits of poverty, with no expectations for improvement in their personal development, and being subject to abuse in general, exploitation and abandonment. The social stigma that still prevails with HIV-AIDS is also an impediment for a better life perspective. There are still a lot of parents who do not report the cases of their children with HIV-AIDS – or their own - to the health authorities, out of fear of rejection or seclusion.

The Ministry of Health of the Federal Government sets forth the importance and need to prevent through education. In this regard, it is expected – as a goal to be reached in the midterm - to introduce the subject of Sexual Health for the Child as an obligatory subject at schools –in coordination with the Ministry of Public Education.⁶

A strategy put into practice by the Ministry of Health (SSA) has been the construction and equipment set up of the Capasits (Centros Ambulatorios de Prevención y Atención en Sida e Infecciones de Transmisión Sexual / Ambulatory Centers for the Prevention and Attention of Aids and Sexually Transmitted diseases) all over the country - by the end of 2007 57 centers had been built and equipped all over the country and

an additional 10 are expected to be ready by the year 2008⁷ which are part of a national strategy to take the attention of this problem away from hospitals and move towards a thorough attention as well as increase its quality. Each Capasits is based on a medical architectonic plan with specific areas for medical and psychological areas, area for sample taking, reception, and a multiple-use ward where group support activities and group treatment-adherence activities can take place.

Another strategy that can be carried out by the Ministry of Health (SSA) has been living out condoms to young people all over the country (more than 30 thousand condoms have been given free of price at concerts and other places where young people participate)

The timely detection of HIV-AIDS continues to be necessary for pregnant women to prevent, reduce and eliminate prenatal infection (this activity still is the number 1 preventive strategy the Ministry of Health conducts to eliminate the prevalence of HIV-AIDS in boys and girls under the supervision of the Centro Nacional de Equidad de Género y Salud Reproductiva (National Center for Gender Equality and Reproductive Health) with the application of the Program Arranque Parejo en la Vida / Even Kick-off for Life) .

All in all, the urgent need to study HIV-AIDS in Mexican children, as well as in all the population, is a topic that requires to be set as a priority in the agendas of federal institutions and NGO's who deal with this topic from a scientific and human right view (non discriminatory) and in order to offer people infected by the disease better opportunities and social integration since the responsibility, acceptance and assimilation.

⁵CONASIDA. <http://www.salud.gob.mx/conasida> 21 de julio de 2008, 12:05pm

⁶Reunión Informativa previa a la XVII Conferencia Internacional de VIH-SIDA. México, DF. 24 de Julio de 2008

⁷Palabras del Secretario de Salud, José Ángel Córdova Villalobos, durante la inauguración del X Congreso Nacional Sobre SIDA y otras infecciones de transmisión sexual y del II Foro Nacional de Prevención, que se llevó a cabo en la ciudad de León, Guanajuato.

EN: http://www.salud.gob.mx/unidades/dgcs/sala_noticias/discursos/2007_11_28-sida.htm

Where's AIDS Heading?

Children and teens possess a series of values, interests and attitudes, knowledge and behavior all related to their individual sphere of sexuality. It's important to identify and detail this sexuality with the objective of establishing educational and formative programs and spaces based on the knowledge of their own preferences, needs, expectations and experiences. These programs and spaces should support and orient the development of a sexuality that is mature and coherent with human quality while stimulating personal responsibility based on their sexual selves.

In the cultural contexts of marginalized urban and rural neighborhoods where the beneficiaries live, it isn't easy to find neutral and adequate spaces to deal with these themes. Parents don't want to talk about them because they don't know how to, due in part to sexuality being taboo, generation after generation.

There is a social myth in which people believe that talking about sex will provoke curiosity and give children "ideas"; thus it's better to keep it quiet. The consequences are visible in the amount of unplanned pregnancies, deaths due to illegal abortions, premature sexual relations, conflictive relationships, sexually transmitted infections, especially AIDS, and a general deficiency in the education of sexual and reproductive health resulting in the aforementioned situations. This is further complicated by the strong sense of guilt that teenagers feel when discovering and exercising their sexuality. This project responds to the need of dealing with sexuality in an open and objective manner.

The discrimination of people with HIV and AIDS is deeply related with the fear of its transmission and the lack of knowledge and experience pertaining to this illness. This discrimination is also related the moralist idea of relating the infection and syndrome to "very inappropriate sexual conduct", following with the logic that carriers deserve their illness for having done "something that is bad".

Faced with this problem and its complexities, Save the Children has assumed the task of establishing a project to deal with adolescents' doubts regarding their sexuality. This became manifest in December of 2000 with the exposition, "What's Up with AIDS?" ("*¿Qué Onda con el SIDA?*"), in the Regional Training Center "Las Yervas" (*Centro Regional de Capacitación Las Yervas – CERCALY*) in Guanajuato. This exposition was by the Center for Exploring Science (*Centro de Ciencias Explora*).

In 2005, Save the Children was able to mount its own exposition, titled "Where's AIDS Heading?". Since then, the exposition has toured various municipalities in the states of Querétaro and Guanajuato.

The goal of "Where's AIDS Heading?" is to better inform the generations of teens, facilitating more and improved communication abilities so that they can talk about sexuality with clarity and the adequate information, producing cells of individuals in each community committed to this cultural transformation. This strategy has been implemented through three phases:

1. Save the Children visits educational centers in order to present the project and establish dates for the adolescents' participation in the activities of the project.

2. Teams of promoters and volunteers are trained so that they can carry out the project activities directly, strengthening their knowledge pertaining to sexuality, and familiarizing them with the use of the educational material as well as the work methodology.
3. The interactive exposition is set up, consisting of panels and educative games in which the children and adolescents can interact in ways that are fun, dynamic, and playful. They learn about how HIV is transmitted, what the symptoms of AIDS are, ways to prevent infection, actions to prevent discrimination, the myths and realities in regards to HIV and AIDS, as well as other related topics. The visit to the exposition also includes:
 - a. An assessment: a survey is applied when the participants arrive in order to determine, in a simple manner, the general level of knowledge that they have regarding the themes that will be covered during their visit.
 - b. A workshop: this is focused on sexuality and gender issues, specifically contemplating the information presented in the exposition. This workshop provides an open and plural space in which ideas and information can be exchanged in an environment of trust and maturity. Two themes of particular importance that are touched upon are safe sex and relationships, allowing the expression of personal values regarding their relations and related ideas.
 - c. Exposition: a guided tour by the promoter or volunteer during which he or she explains the material and promotes the exchange of ideas so that afterwards the participants can personally interact with the material in the different modules.
 - d. Evaluation: at the end of the visit, the participants fill out an evaluation in order to give their impressions regarding the material, the methodology used, the promoters' work, the themes and content covered, as well as their opinion on other aspects of the project. The information is analyzed afterwards in order to measure the impact on the participants as well as to find ways of improving the project.

The objectives of the project are:

- to contribute to the participants' knowledge of sexuality and gender equality, permitting them to identify and express their preferences, needs, expectations, and personal experiences
- to dismiss myths regarding HIV and AIDS by deepening their objective understanding of this ailment and how it's related to the discrimination of carriers
- to inspire children and teens to assume the responsibility of seeking trustworthy and objective information so that they can make conscientious decisions, ensuring they live in a healthy and dignified manner

In its two stages, this project has benefitted over 15,000 youths whose ages range between 12 and 19. 45% of the participants were male while 55% were female.