

Minister: HIV in India down by 56%

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New Delhi: During the last decade in India, HIV infections have declined by 56 percent from 2.7 lakh in 2000 to 1.2 lakh in 2009. This was stated by Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad, minister, Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, at the International HIV Vaccine Symposium in New Delhi on August 13, 2012.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony, Mr Azad said that HIV was detected in India over 25 years ago. Valuable knowledge and experience has been accumulated as a result of extensive interventions for control of the epidemic and it seems to be stabilizing now. India is among the few countries which have made significant reductions in HIV infections.

The strategy involving national response to HIV/AIDS in India is implemented through the National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) and prevention and care as-well-as support and treatment yielded encouraging outcomes over the last decade. New evidence from the latest round of HIV sentinel surveillance shows further decline in the HIV Prevalence among general population as-well-as high risk groups. This has been possible due to political support at the highest levels to the various interventions under National AIDS Control Programme, including from Parliamentarians and elected leaders at the state and local levels and cooperation received from NGOs, civil society and the Media.

One of the successful interventions of the national AIDS control programme has been the targeted interventions (TIs), whose main objective is to improve health seeking behavior of high risk groups and reducing their vulnerability and risk to acquire sexually transmitted and HIV infections. There are 1,821 Targeted Interventions providing prevention services covering 81 percent female sex workers, 80 percent injecting drug users, 64 percent men having sex with men, 40 percent migrants and 57 percent truckers.

Azad said that the trend of annual AIDS- related deaths is showing a steady decline since the roll out of free ART programme in India in 2004. Besides the domestic programme, India has been providing around 80 percent of global ARV drug demand. Vaccines have been frequently cited as one-of-the-most equitable low-cost, high-impact public health measures.

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Historically, vaccines have impacted significantly the spread of infectious diseases such as smallpox, polio, measles, and yellow fever. The eradication of smallpox was an outstanding display of concerted global action in a war against microbial invaders. The progress in expanding polio and measles vaccination efforts and their elimination from many regions further

demonstrated that vaccines are among the most powerful public health tools.

Mr Azad said that India is committed to new forms of partnership with low-income countries through innovative support mechanisms and South-South cooperation. He hoped that this joint venture will collectively shape the future of India's inputs into the global HIV vaccine development attempts.