



Scientists and Health Care Workers
Committed to HIV/AIDS

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AIDS IN AFRICA

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The first cases of AIDS in Africans were confirmed in Europe in 1981 and in Africa in 1983. At present, the epidemiology of AIDS in Africa is unclear, due to marked variations in surveillance effort and in reporting of cases. Nevertheless, it is clear that LAV/HTLV-III has established itself solidly in Africa. The regional distribution of cases appears heterogeneous. Currently, 80% of cases are from Central and East Africa, 6% from Southern Africa, and 14% from the rest of the Continent. Published seroprevalence figures for the general population range from 0-24% for Southern Africa (South Africa, Malawi), to 4-6% for Central (Central African Republic, Zaire) and West Africa (Senegal), to 18-23% for East Africa (Rwanda, Uganda). In general, men with multiple sex partners and unmarried women are most affected by LAV/HTLV-III. It is also clear that sexual contact is the most important mode of viral transmission. The clinical profile consists of systemic signs and symptoms, along with gastrointestinal, respiratory, mucocutaneous and neurologic involvement. The clinical evolution of AIDS patients is inexorable and fatal, with one-third dying during the hospitalization during which the diagnosis is established, and an overall mean survival after diagnosis of about one year. Seroincidence is estimated to be about 1% annually and 1-2% of asymptomatic LAV/HTLV-III seropositives develop AIDS in one year. AIDS may be considered symbolic of recent social and economic aspects of African life. Willful silence, refusal to recognize a problem, and misplaced pride characterize the attitude of some governments towards this disease. Other governments have encouraged and promoted AIDS research, while insisting on true international collaboration rather than one-sided research programs. Several countries have established national AIDS committees, which are defining appropriate national surveillance, clinical and prevention programs. Informed populations are circumspect and anxious and may be ready to alter their lifestyle if necessary.

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