

World AIDS Day and Bangladesh
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The World Health Organization established 1st December World AIDS Day in 1988. World AIDS Campaign is the leading international organization which plans and implements the observance.

The theme of this year is “Universal Access and Human Rights” World AIDS Day, is a day dedicated to commemorate those who have passed away and to raise awareness about AIDS and the global spread of the HIV virus.

Global leaders have pledged to work towards universal access to HIV and AIDS treatment, prevention and care, recognising these as fundamental human rights.

Led by the World AIDS Campaign organization, for the second year in a row, the theme for World AIDS Day 2010 is to highlight and underscore the importance of understanding HIV and AIDS from a human-rights perspective.

The campaign slogans for World AIDS Day 2010 are:

I am accepted

I am safe

I am getting treatment

I am well

I am living my rights

Everyone deserves to live their rights

Right to Live

Right to Health

Access for all to HIV prevention treatment care and support is a critical part of human rights

What is AIDS?

The term AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency. It is a serious disease that weakens the body's immune system, leaving it to fight off illness.

The HIV virus,(the Human Immunodeficiency Virus) which eventually may lead to AIDS may be dormant in a human body for years. AIDS may not develop. AIDS is the last stage in a progression of diseases resulting from a viral infection of HIV Virus.

The AIDS diseases include a number of unusual and severe infections, cancers, and debilitating illnesses, resulting in severe weight loss or wasting away and diseases affecting the brain and central nervous system.

There is no cure for HIV infection or AIDS nor is there a vaccine to prevent HIV infection. However medications can not only slow the progression of the AIDS disease

but also suppress the virus, thereby restoring the body's immune function and permitting many HIV infected persons to lead normal, disease free life.

HIV Virus can be transmitted to a person through three main routes:

- Transmission of virus through body secretions through body-intimate contact
- Transmission of virus through blood or blood products, most often through the sharing of syringes and needles.
- Transmission of virus during pregnancy from infected mother to fetus.

HIV virus cannot be transmitted from touching someone or sharing items, such as cups or through coughing or sneezing. However, sharing a razor does pose small risk in that blood from infected person can be transmitted from one person to another.

According to UNAIDS, two million people worldwide died of AIDS-related illnesses in 2008. By 2009, an estimated 33.4 million people around the world were living with HIV.

Bangladesh & AIDS:

Bangladesh Government, various NGOs and other entities observed the day. There were processions with banners in various parts of the country. Special supplements were published by leading daily newspapers on the day.

Earlier a leading daily held a Roundtable on "Strategic Information and HIV Prevention among Adolescents" in which UN representatives including UN AIDS, UNFPA, Bangladeshi academics, doctors, representatives of NGOs, and ICDDRDB spoke about how to prevent, treat the disease among adolescents. It is reported that prevalence of the virus is found among youths.

At the age of puberty, youth goes through certain physical and psychological change and they do not know on how to cope with all the needs of sensitive information about the human reproductive cycle. Parents are too shy to discuss with them. Adolescents face the problem of generation gap between their teachers, parents and themselves.

The adolescents' behaviour, practice and lack of knowledge are the vulnerability factors for HIV virus. Furthermore, the local environment they live and the company they mix with make them vulnerable to the transmission of virus.

There is a difference between urban and rural population. Majority of our population live in the rural areas and they have limited access to information about the virus and causes of transmission from person to person.

The young people are exploited and abused both physically and mentally. In Bangladesh HIV virus is alarmingly increasing among the injecting drug users which according to a report, has already increased to 11% per cent in a neighbourhood in Dhaka city. The drug sellers have a huge lucrative business supported by criminal gangs.

Bangladesh government reportedly disclosed that as of October 2010, with the new 343 cases, the total number of HIV virus infected persons is 2,088 in the country, out of which AIDS has developed to 850 individuals. So far 241 people died of AIDS-related diseases.

HIV virus infected people suffer from social stigma because of ignorance and prejudice among the community in the country. Children are most vulnerable to the virus as there is reportedly no programme for the children.

The vast majority of people with HIV virus are the lower and middle-income countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal, India, Indonesia, Myanmar and Thailand.

Bangladesh is a nation where almost 50% of the total population is below 25 years old. They may be engaging in HIV virus behaviour. The challenge is how to reach them with correct information and right services. Many experts have recommended that it is imperative to provide knowledge of transmission of HIV virus from the age of 11.

Statistics show that the age of HIV-infected persons is between 18-24. Many of them are illiterate and poor. They live in remote areas. The challenge is how to reach them with information of HIV virus.

This demographic picture poses a huge risk for Bangladesh unless issues of awareness of the HIV virus, of stigma and ignorance and the imperative to prevent transmission of HIV to the young people are central to the response to HIV/AIDS.

Many suggested that in the curriculum of secondary schools, under health and hygiene, knowledge of HIV virus may be included.

However the challenge is the persuasion of the conservative religious society permitting teachers to teach the chapter of human reproductive system.

To have an active programme, young people needs to be involved in chalking out programmes of prevention, social stigma and ignorance. Private sector may also help in the campaign of information to young people who are usually shy to ask for sensitive information about human body.

World AIDS Day provides an opportunity for individuals, communities and governments and political leaders to take action and ensure that transmission of HIV virus is prevented and thus human rights are rightly protected.