

Maldives

UNICEF HIV and AIDS Programming Country Profile 2006



HIV and AIDS in the Maldives

The first Maldivian with HIV was identified in late 1991. As of December 31 2005, the reported number of Maldivians with HIV was 13, of which 10 have died of AIDS related diseases. All fall in the 20-49 age group, the youngest being 20 and the oldest 49 years of age. Reported cases of foreigners as of 31 December 2005 was 168 aged 15- 55. Although the number of reported people living with HIV/AIDS in the Maldives is very small, a number of factors make the country vulnerable to the spread of HIV. As in many countries, numbers of cases may be underreported – mainly due to the social stigma attached to the infection, limited surveillance and voluntary counselling and testing systems.

A comprehensive AIDS Control Programme was launched in 1987, following the global escalation of the HIV pandemic with the aim of limiting the spread of HIV in the country. In the same year, the President's Office formed a multi-sectoral representative body, the National AIDS Council (NAC), to provide direction to the national response. The NAC consists of high level policy makers, academics and NGO representatives. The focus of the programme has been public awareness-raising around HIV prevention measures.



A HIV/AIDS situation analysis was carried out in June 2000. The priority concern identified is the risk from drug abuse. The importance of the population mobility has also been stressed as a vulnerability factor in the situation analysis, and is an illustration of the social dimensions of the epidemic.

Strategy and Objectives

The government's first HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan (2002-2006) was developed for control and prevention of HIV/AIDS. Its overall goal is to prevent HIV transmission in the country and build the country's capacity to respond effectively to the possible spread of HIV/AIDS. The following objectives contribute towards achievement of the goal:

Objectives

- ✘ Sustain high political commitment and integrated response at various levels including the community
- ✘ Prevent transmission of HIV/AIDS in the country
- ✘ Strengthening the country's capacity to respond to the HIV/AIDS epidemic
- ✘ Provide adequate care and support to infected persons and people living with AIDS
- ✘ Promote safe practices and behaviour among target groups
- ✘ Decrease the prevalence of STI
- ✘ Decrease social and economic impact

UNICEF's work on HIV and AIDS in the Maldives is in support of the National Strategic Plan, and focuses on reducing adolescent's risks and vulnerabilities.

Vulnerabilities and risks facing children and young people

- ✘ **Young population:** 62% of the population are below 25
- ✘ **Physical Geography:** The population is spread across more than 190 inhabited islands making it difficult to access counselling and testing services once available
- ✘ **Mobility:** The high mobility rate, among migrant workers, students, small businessmen, seamen, and tourists
- ✘ **Drug use:** Recent and disturbing increase in the number of young people using drugs. High risk sexual behaviours and injection drug use/sharing of needles are found among drug users.
- ✘ **Pre-marital sex:** While little is known of adolescents' sexual behaviours, several studies indicate sex before marriage.
- ✘ **Low condom use:** Only 6% of adolescents use condoms for contraception. One can assume that condom use for disease prevention is even less. Anecdotal reports also suggest that low-condom use amongst men having sex with men (including youth) is occurring.
- ✘ **Blood transfusions:** While all blood is screened in the Maldives, some people seek medical services in neighbouring countries, with an attendant risk of infection from blood transfusions.



UNICEF's HIV and AIDS Programme Areas



© UNICEF/HQ05-0271/Giacomo Pirozzi - MALDIVES: Two girls play with hula hoops on the playground at Huraa School on Huraa Island, 15 kilometres from Male, the capital. UNICEF is providing psychosocial support and education materials to all schools with children affected by the tsunami

Targets

- ✘ To ensure increased knowledge and improved attitudes among adolescents and youths with respect to HIV/AIDS/STIs.
- ✘ To contain the spread of HIV/AIDS by appropriately achieving knowledge, attitude and behaviour development/change among adolescents and young people, especially those most at risk.

Prevention: Reduce adolescent risks and vulnerability to HIV by increasing access to and use of gender-sensitive prevention information, skills and services.

Approximately one third of the Maldivian population is below 25 years of age. Youth report pre-marital sex and two thirds report having sex before the age of 18. The Reproductive Health Baseline Survey (MoH 2001) shows knowledge of modes of HIV/AIDS transmission is high among both boys and girls. These trends combined with high levels of mobility as migrant workers, students, seamen are away from their families for a long time and the influx of tourists to the islands increase the vulnerability of young people to HIV – particularly when coupled with low levels of condom use as reported. Further risk is found amongst the rising number of drug users who are injecting and the high risk sexual behaviour found in this group.

Current programmes

- ✘ UNICEF is supporting initiatives to improve the quality of teaching helping to reduce vulnerability to HIV.
- ✘ Working with young recovering drug addicts to provide prevention and recovery services including HIV prevention for those adolescents most-at-risk.

Future Programme Priorities

- ✘ Increase awareness of HIV/AIDS among teachers and religious leaders
- ✘ UNICEF to take a leadership and advocacy role in promoting HIV/AIDS awareness building, knowledge and life skills development among adolescents in partnership with other UN agencies
- ✘ Awareness creation among communities and adolescents regarding HIV/AIDS/STIs, and promoting healthy lifestyles, including drug use prevention.
- ✘ Support to policy makers in breaking the silence surrounding HIV/AIDS and its links to drug abuse, address stigma and discrimination

PMTCT Plus: Reduce HIV infections among pregnant women and prevent transmission of HIV to their infants. **Paediatric treatment:** Universal access of HIV infected children to treatment, care and support.

Drugs to prevent mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) and HIV testing and counselling services are available to children and pregnant mothers if needed. Support services including care and treatment programme are also available for HIV patients if required. Paediatric HIV drug formulations, including co-trimoxazole to prevent opportunistic infections are available if needed.

Future Programme Priorities

- ✘ To develop PMTCT and paediatric AIDS guidelines
- ✘ Build capacity of healthcare workers to provide comprehensive PMTCT and treatment, care and support for infected mothers and children
- ✘ Improve quality of diagnostic services and supply chain management
- ✘ Develop communication strategy and materials on PMTCT/voluntary counselling and testing for health care providers

Protection, care and support for children affected by HIV/AIDS: Increase the proportion of children orphaned and made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS receiving quality family, community and government support, including education, healthcare, nutrition and psychosocial support

Future Programme Priorities

- ✘ UNICEF will advocate with relevant government agencies, including the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Gender and Family, to monitor the situation of children affected and/or infected by HIV/AIDS. Support Situation Analysis of HIV/AIDS for development of new National Strategic Plan as part of UN Theme Group activities
- ✘ UNICEF is supporting the government in providing families and children with psycho-social support through the establishment of atoll-based Social Protection Centers.

Target

- ✘ To develop a comprehensive PMTCT programme with focus on primary prevention
- ✘ All HIV-exposed babies receive cotrimoxazole prophylaxis
- ✘ All identified HIV-positive children have access to drugs, medicines and treatment for opportunistic infections.
- ✘ All identified HIV-positive children who require it, have access to appropriate

Target

- ✘ To ensure the rights and need of children affected by HIV and AIDS are met within a broad protective environment approach.

Partnerships:

UNICEF plays a lead role in the UN Theme Group on HIV/AIDS, especially in coordinating a joint response to HIV/AIDS by the National Narcotics Control Bureau and the Department of Public Health. A key strategy for engaging civil society as partners in addressing HIV/AIDS is involving religious leaders. UNICEF is also working with a local NGO to provide drug prevention and recovery services to adolescents, including HIV/AIDS prevention information.

Future Programme Priorities

- ✂ *Support Situation Analysis of HIV/AIDS for development of new National Strategic Plan as part of UN Theme Group activities*
- ✂ *Strengthen coordination efforts with other UN agencies and partners to ensure a multi-sectoral approach*

UNICEF Maldives

UN Building
Rah'dhebai Hin'gun
Male'
Maldives
Tel: +960 334 3344
Fax: +960 332 6469

UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia

HIV/AIDS Section
Lekhnath Marg, Lainchaur
P.O. Box 5815
Kathmandu
Nepal
Tel: +977 1 4417 082
Fax: +977 1 4419 479



© UNICEF/HQ05-0264/Giacomo Pirozzi
MALDIVES: A girl stands on Gan Island in Laamu Atoll, some 265 kilometres south of Male, the capital. She is among 600 inhabitants from nearby Mundoo Island who have been displaced by the tsunami.

Sources and Relevant Documents:

HIV/AIDS Strategic Plan, Maldives 2002-2006, MOH
National HIV/AIDS Policy, 2002, MOH
National HIV/AIDS & STI Surveillance Guidelines, 2005, DPH
National HIV/AIDS Treatment Guidelines, 2005, MOH, DPH
RTI/STI Survey 2002, MOH
Voluntary Counselling & Testing (VCT), 2004, DPH
www.youandaids.org