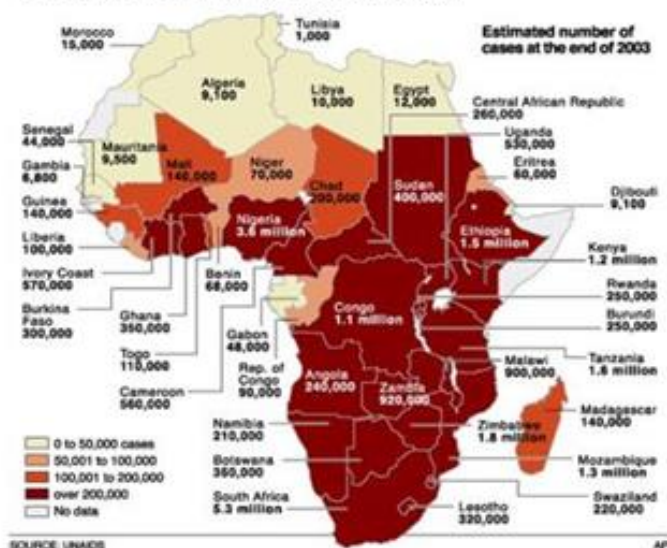


# HIV/AIDS

## AIDS in Africa

Of the estimated 39.4 million people living with HIV worldwide, more than two-thirds of them are in Africa.



An AIDS patient



Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) is a lentivirus (a member of the retrovirus family) that can lead to acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), a condition in humans in which the immune system begins to fail, leading to life-threatening opportunistic infections.

Ghana's first case of AIDS was reported in 1986. The early epidemic in Ghana developed primarily as a result of the economic crisis of the 1980s and the vulnerabilities of migrants who fled to neighboring countries in search of economic opportunities, some of whom resorted to sex work or relied on sexual partners in order to survive.

Infection with HIV occurs by the transfer of blood, semen, vaginal fluid, pre-ejaculate, or breast milk. The four major routes of transmission are:

- 1) Through unprotected sex (i.e. without a condom) with an infected person
- 2) Sharing of contaminating sharp, skin-piercing objects (e.g., razor blades or needles)
- 3) Through contaminated blood or blood products (e.g., blood transfusion)
- 4) From an infected mother to baby through pregnancy, labor and delivery, or breast-feeding.

HIV is NOT spread through casual contact, such as sharing a meal together, talking with someone, or using the same washroom.

The government of Ghana responded quickly to the threat of HIV/AIDS with the establishment in 1985 of a National Technical Advisory Commission on AIDS and in 1987 with the National AIDS/STD Control Program. Although the epidemic is much worse in East and Southern African countries, Ghana today nonetheless has a generalized epidemic with a national prevalence of 1.9%. A generalized epidemic is a country with a prevalence higher than 1%, which means that the epidemic is not primarily confined to people who have risky behaviors, such as sex workers or people with multiple sex partners. In a generalized epidemic, people with only one sex partner are at risk of contracting HIV.

Antiretroviral therapy (ART) enables people infected with HIV to regain their strength and live normal lives,