

1. HEALTH STATUS

1.12. AIDS incidence and HIV prevalence

The first cases of Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) were diagnosed 30 years ago. The onset of AIDS is normally caused as a result of HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) infection and can manifest itself as a number of different diseases, such as pneumonia and tuberculosis, as the immune system is no longer able to defend the body, leaving it susceptible to opportunistic infections and tumors. There is a time lag between HIV infection, AIDS diagnosis and death, which can be any number of years depending on the treatment administered. Despite worldwide research, there is no cure currently available.

In 2009, around 50 000 new cases of AIDS were reported across OECD countries, representing an unweighted average incidence rate of 14.0 per million population (Figure 1.12.1). Following the first reporting of AIDS cases in the early 1980s, the number rose rapidly to reach an average of more than 40 new cases per million population across OECD countries at its peak in the middle of the 1990s, nearly three times the current incidence rate (Figure 1.12.2). Public awareness and prevention campaigns contributed to steady declines in reported cases through the second half of the 1990s. In addition, the development and greater availability of antiretroviral drugs, which reduce or slow down the development of the disease, led to a sharp decrease in incidence during 1996-97.

The United States has consistently had the highest AIDS incidence rates among OECD countries, although it is important to note that the case reporting definitions were expanded in 1993 and hence differ from the definition used across Europe and other OECD countries. The change in definition also explains the large increase in cases in the United States in 1993 (Figure 1.12.2). Among emerging countries, the situation in South Africa remains dire with an incidence rate more than 50 times that of the United States. In excess of 10% of the entire population – and close to one-in-five of the adult population – was living with HIV infection in 2009, although there is some evidence of a slowing in incidence (UNAIDS, 2010).

In Europe, Spain reported the highest incidence rates in the first decade following the outbreak, although there has been a sharp decline since 1994, currently leaving Estonia and Portugal with the highest rates among European countries. Central European countries such as the Czech and Slovak Republics, Poland and Hungary, along with Iceland, Turkey and Germany reported the lowest incidence rates of AIDS among OECD countries in 2009.

In the United States, more than one million people are living with HIV/AIDS, with one-in-five unaware of their infection (CDC, 2010a). Almost three-quarters of new cases of AIDS are among men, and racial and ethnic minorities continue to be disproportionately affected by the epidemic. In Canada, Aboriginal people are over-represented. The predominant modes of transmission of HIV are through men having sex with men, and heterosexual contact. However, among eastern European countries injecting drug use is also a common mode (ECDC and WHO Europe, 2010).

In recent years, the overall decline in AIDS cases in OECD countries has slowed down. This reversal has been accompanied by evidence of increasing transmission of HIV in several European countries, attributed to complacency regarding the effectiveness of treatment and a waning of public awareness regarding drug use and sexual practice. Further inroads in AIDS incidence rates will require more intensive HIV prevention programmes that are focused and adapted to reach those most at risk of HIV infection (UNAIDS, 2010).

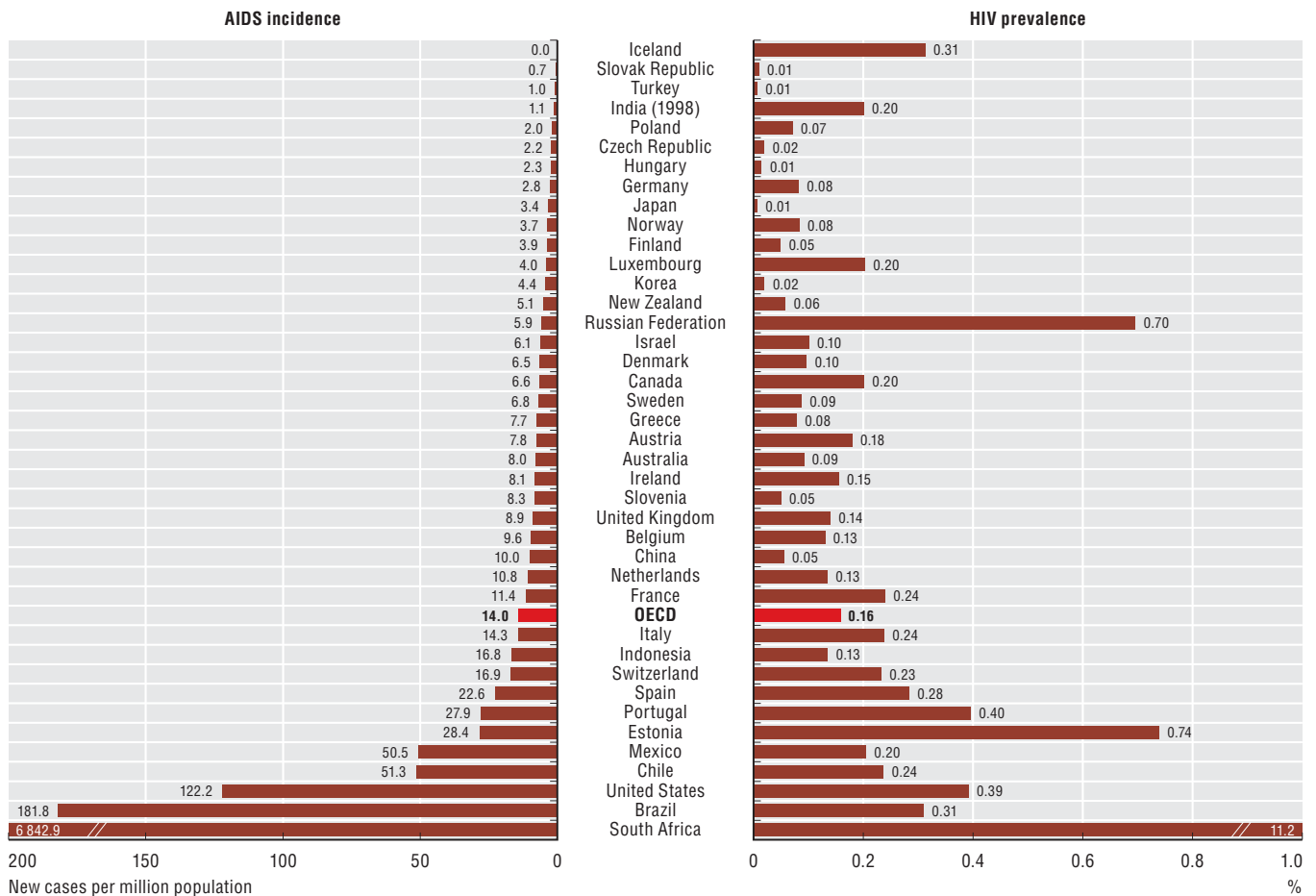
Definition and comparability

The incidence rate of AIDS is the number of new cases per million population at year of diagnosis. The prevalence rate of HIV is the proportion of the population living with the disease at a given time. Note that data for recent years are provisional due to reporting delays, which sometimes can be for several years depending on the country.

The United States expanded their AIDS surveillance case definition in 1993 to include T-lymphocyte count criteria. This broadening of the definition led to a large increase in the number of new cases in the United States in 1993 and explains some of the current variations in AIDS incidence between the United States and other OECD countries.

Information on data for Israel: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932315602>.

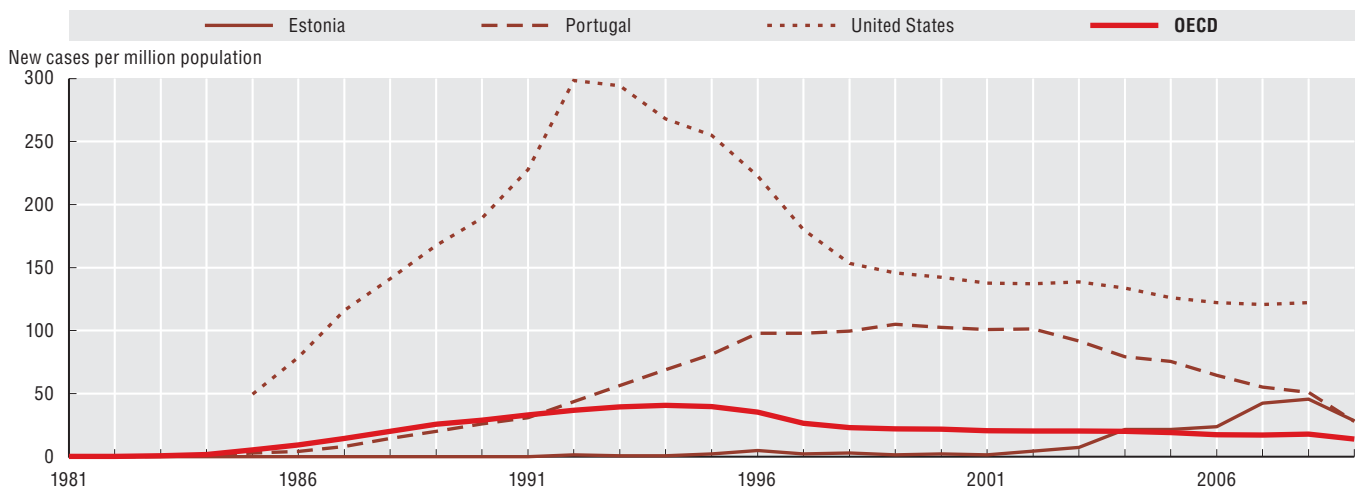
1.12.1 AIDS incidence and estimated HIV prevalence, 2009 (or nearest year)



Source: OECD Health Data 2011; UNAIDS (2010).

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932523842>

1.12.2 Trends in AIDS incidence rates, selected OECD countries, 1981-2009



Source: OECD Health Data 2011.

StatLink <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/888932523861>



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