

## Current Features of the HIV Pandemic



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**SUMMARY:** Three possible transmission modes of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) are currently accepted: sexual, parenteral, and vertical. Globally, the main route of transmission is unprotected sexual intercourse with an HIV-positive partner. Parenteral transmission poses the highest risk for intravenous drug users (IUDs). Thanks to antiretroviral therapy, vertical mother-to-child transmission has become exceptional in developed countries. According to the statistics of the World Health Organisation, there were a total of 31.4–35.3 million HIV-infected people living in the world at the end of 2009, including approximately 3 million children under 15 years of age. The numbers of those actually infected are certain to be much higher.

A link between the use of addictive substances and HIV has been evident since the beginning of the HIV pandemic. The intravenous administration of heroin is the most common mode of transmission of HIV infection among injecting drug users. Today we have a lot of relevant evidence of the usefulness and effectiveness of opioid substitution therapy and its contribution to primary and secondary HIV prevention. The spread of HIV infection associated with non-injected stimulants (cocaine, methamphetamine, etc.) involves high-risk behaviour. Alcohol abuse appears to be no less serious in relationship to HIV. Generally, addictive substances and alcohol abuse lead to significantly poorer patient-physician cooperation, low levels of adherence to treatment, including HIV treatment, riskier behaviour, a lower rate of success of anti-retroviral therapy, and the rapid progression of chronic diseases as a result of the toxic effect of alcohol or the HIV/hepatitis C virus (HCV) or HIV/hepatitis B virus (HBV) co-infections.

**KEY WORDS:** HIV EPIDEMIOLOGY – MODES OF HIV TRANSMISSION – DRUG USERS – HIV/HCV CO-INFECTION – HIV/HBV CO-INFECTION

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