

Cairo, Egypt, 4 November, 2013 – A dedicated supplement of key scientific studies on the HIV epidemic in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region was published today in the journal of Sexually Transmitted Infections. The studies provide critical evidence from the field on the status of the epidemic in the MENA region and showcase the progress of HIV research in this region over the last few years. The selection of published studies was based on originality and potential to impact policy and programming.

The journal is delighted to support this important publication which attests to the wealth of sexual health research emerging from the region. As an international journal, we hope that recognition of this work will lead to new and increasingly effective programmes of HIV and sexually transmitted infection prevention and care in the region and beyond," said Professor Jackie Cassell, Editor in Chief of Sexually Transmitted Infections.

The publication is the result of concerted efforts by a number of individuals and organizations for over two years. These efforts were spearheaded and funded by the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East and North Africa Regional Support Team of UNAIDS, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS MENA), and the Weill Cornell Medical College, Qatar.

"These studies demonstrate that the HIV epidemic is a growing reality in this region that must be countered by an aggressive response," said Dr Laith Abu-Raddad, Associate Professor of Public Health at the Weill Cornell Medical College, Qatar, and the co-Editor of this supplement. "If HIV infection transmission is not controlled in one at-risk population, it can spread to other at-risk populations," he added.

The set of articles start with a study describing the progress of HIV research in the MENA region since the discovery of the epidemic, and testifies to the achievements of recent years. This is followed by a study of HIV surveillance systems that demonstrates the successes of a few countries and exposes the limited progress in most countries. The supplement also includes surveillance studies from Sudan, Pakistan, Islamic Republic of Iran, Morocco and Qatar.

The studies establish the extent to which HIV and other sexually transmitted infections have affected different populations, and most of these are among the very first such studies in their respective countries. The investigations show that the HIV epidemic is a reality among different

population groups, such as people who inject drugs, and their sexual partners, men who have sex with men, and female sex workers. The supplement concludes with a study mapping HIV transmission in Morocco, the first study of its kind in the MENA region.

“This supplement is a testament to the progress in HIV epidemiological research in the region over the last few years. It demonstrates that conducting surveys among populations at higher risk of HIV and sexually transmitted infections is feasible in this region despite the challenges. Several of the studies presented have prompted planning for urgently needed interventions to prevent growing epidemics in these populations. Although the progress of research is encouraging, there are still major gaps in our knowledge of the HIV epidemic in the MENA region,” said Dr Gabriele Riedner, Regional Advisor for HIV/AIDS/STIs at the WHO Regional Office for the Eastern Mediterranean.

“This is a promising beginning, but one that needs to be nurtured,” said Dr Yamina Chakkar, Regional Director of UNAIDS, MENA. “Governments and other partners in the MENA region should actively support and invest in the development of national and regional infrastructures to generate the data and create the knowledge essential for evidence-informed policy development and programming,” she added.

The supplement including all studies can be found at

[http://sti.bmj.com/content/89/Suppl\\_3.toc](http://sti.bmj.com/content/89/Suppl_3.toc)

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About WHO

In the 21st century, health is a shared responsibility, involving equitable access to essential care and collective defence against transnational threats. WHO is the directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system. It is responsible for providing leadership on global health matters, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy options, providing technical support to countries and monitoring and assessing health trends.

## About UNAIDS

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations – United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), UNICEF, World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), UN Women, International Labour Organization (ILO), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), WHO and the World Bank – and works closely with global and national partners to maximize results for the AIDS response. Learn more at [unaids.org](http://unaids.org) and connect with us on Facebook and Twitter.

## About Cornell

Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar is part of Weill Cornell Medical College. It was established in 2001 through a partnership between Cornell University and Qatar Foundation. WCMC-Q has a leading research programme and offers an innovative educational programme that includes a two-year premedical programme followed by a four-year medical programme leading to the M.D. degree from Cornell University (web site: <http://www.qatar-med.cornell.edu>)

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