

Jerusalem, April 17, 2016

Dear Madam or Sir,

Global AIDS Response Progress Report 2016 - Narrative Report from Israel

The HIV epidemic state in Israel is defined as a low-level epidemic state according to 2000 UNAIDS/ WHO guideline. However, some population groups are at a higher risk for HIV transmission: Injecting Drug Users (IDU), Men who have Sex with Men (MSM), and immigrants originating from a country with a Generalized HIV Epidemic (OGE) (mostly from Sub Saharan Africa). Therefore, our national preventive and treatment efforts are implemented through a multifaceted approach for each of these target populations.

The Israeli Ministry of Health (MoH) monitors HIV on a national level. Examples of some key statistics on HIV indicators are as follows:

- The incidence of HIV/AIDS in Israel in 2014 was 56.4 new cases per million population.
- At the end of 2014, 0.017% of the general population aged 15–24 were living with HIV.
- It is estimated that the prevalence of MSM aged 15-54 who were living with HIV at the end of 2014 was 2.26%.
- It is estimated that 70% among all Israeli adults and children living with HIV in Israel are currently receiving ART.
- Undocumented migrants are eligible to be referred to a free of charge MoH program, existing since January 2014. Among those referred, currently 75% of those under medical surveillance are receiving ART.
- In 2014, 20 out of 21 new TB cases (both Israelis and non-Israelis) occurring among HIV patients received both TB and ART treatment.
- In 2014, one HIV positive baby was born.
- In 2015, 214,777 syringes were distributed as part of our national Syringe Exchange Programs (SEP) located in 5 major cities.

HIV is on the agenda of many stakeholders in Israel. A wide range of activities are carried out by the MoH in HIV prevention and care.

Examples of some of these activities are as follows:

1. Free of charge HIV confidential testing (using fourth generation testing) for all residents (regardless of citizenship).
2. Extensive health care services and ART medications are available for people living with HIV (PLWHIV), free of charge, who are Israeli citizens. Some 30 medications are covered in the national basket of health services and medications as well as infant feeding formula which is free of charge for HIV positive women.
3. Social services are available in each of the eight AIDS centers located throughout Israel.
4. The MoH has made available, free of charge, health care follow-up and ART to a major portion of undocumented migrants who are living with HIV (see above), and to all HIV positive pregnant women including 6 months post-delivery.
5. The MoH employs HIV cultural mediators originating from Ethiopia for PLWHIV in this community.
6. The MoH initiates and funds prevention and intervention campaigns for the MSM community together with major NGOs from the gay community.
7. The MoH together with NGOs funds intervention campaigns and outreach programs for the undocumented residents originating from high-endemic countries.
8. The MoH together with the Israeli anti-Drug and Alcohol Authority set up 5 Syringe Exchange Program centers. Sterile syringes and condoms as well as light snacks, are provided. To those interested, referral to detox and rehab centers are provided.
9. Prisoners who are living with HIV receive full (and free of charge) medical care.
10. All organ donations are verified to be HIV negative, and all blood donations are checked with HIV testing and NAT.
11. A National Ethics committee on HIV/AIDS was founded in 2005 under the Patient's Rights Act and convenes ad-hoc to address ethical dilemmas.
12. Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) is available since 2000 and only a minor fee/co-payment/deductable is required.
13. IVF treatment and sperm washing is available to HIV positive couples.
14. The MoH is in the initial stages of designing a multi-site study to evaluate the feasibility of implementing Pre Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) on a national level.

To a certain degree stigma surrounding HIV still exists in Israel. The Department of TB and AIDS at the MoH collaborates with various departments within the MoH and with NGOs, and together strive to normalize HIV in the mindset of the general public and to improve the quality of life for PLWHIV in Israel. For instance, regarding the issue of private health insurance and mortgages for PLWHIV, some progress in Israel has been achieved: one insurance company offers life insurance policies to PLWHIV, which makes them eligible for a mortgage. Other social issues related to HIV are addressed on a national level. Specific Ministry of Education regulations prohibit discrimination and endorse compulsory schooling for all children (beginning at pre-school through high-school). Therefore, all HIV positive children receive schooling. For a more elaborate description of some of these issues described above, see the bibliography listed below.

In conclusion, Israel developed a multifaceted approach for addressing specific HIV-related Public Health needs of the residents of Israel. In addition to all these efforts, the MoH is committed, together with additional stakeholders and civil societies, to continue to promote HIV prevention, care and treatment in Israel.

Best regards,

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Cc:

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