



**World Health
Organization**

Western Pacific Region

Press Release

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Drug use pushing the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Asia

KUALA LUMPUR, 7 December 2009—The World Health Organization (WHO) said today that studies show that HIV/AIDS in Asia is now mainly driven by drug use and that the epidemic is poised to spread explosively to the sexual partners of people who use drugs.

The Asian Report on AIDS, supported by the Asian Development Bank and coordinated by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), warned that drug use, particularly intravenously, is responsible for an increase in the number of HIV infections in many countries in Asia.

A further risk lies in the high prevalence of non-injecting drug use, such as amphetamine stimulants, where users often engage in behaviour that poses a high risk of HIV infection, notably through unprotected sex.

WHO, with partner agencies, is meeting today in Kuala Lumpur to finalize a regional strategy for harm reduction in relation to HIV/AIDS in Asia and the Pacific for 2010–2015. The meeting will also review barriers that have been identified to the implementation of the current strategy, which expires this year.

The new strategy takes into account problems that have emerged in moves to scale up a response to the changing nature of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. These problems include new drugs such as amphetamine-type substances and the growing threat from co-infection with hepatitis C.

One of the objectives of the new strategy is to scale up needle and syringe programmes as well as voluntary drug treatment and social rehabilitation, and to provide affordable testing and counselling, support and treatment for HIV and hepatitis B and C.

WHO will help Member States develop their plans by analysing roadblocks and barriers in the way of universal access to comprehensive and quality treatment for HIV. "The bottom line is that the health sector cannot impact the HIV/AIDS epidemic all by itself," said Dr Shin Young-soo, WHO's Regional Director for the Western Pacific. "Only a new multisectoral strategy, built and owned by all stakeholders, can halt HIV/AIDS."

The strategy was developed by the United Nations Regional Task Force on Injecting Drug Use and HIV/AIDS for Asia and the Pacific with WHO, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and UNAIDS in consultation with Member States.

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