

Uganda to treat more people infected with HIV with antiretrovirals

Uganda has introduced a programme to increase the number of people infected with HIV who are treated with antiretroviral drugs.

Uganda's original HIV treatment programme started treatment at a lower CD4 count of less than 200 cells/mm³. The new guidelines will start treatment at a CD4 count of 350 cells/mm³.

The higher cut-off is estimated to more than double the number of people infected with HIV in Uganda who will be treated with antiretrovirals, from about 125 000 to 300 000.

The government run Uganda AIDS Commission estimates that the number of children aged 7-12 years who are treated with antiretrovirals will rise from 13 000 to 50 000.

Ugandan health officials say that the project, which is being supported by the World Health Organization, has been introduced in response to the rising number of new cases of HIV infection in the country each year.

Statistics show that an average of 80 000 new cases of HIV infections were registered in Uganda each year before 2001. The annual number of new infections then began to increase steadily, from 100 000 a year in 2005 to the latest figure of 130 000. New infections are more common in women aged 30-34 years and in men aged 40-45 years.

Uganda has been running a widely acclaimed and ambitious AIDS control programme, but health officials attribute the rise in new HIV infections to laxity in infection prevention measures among people who thought that taking antiretrovirals had cured their infection and so resumed having unprotected sex.

Health officials also say that the increase in the new infections has been caused by a lack of funds to purchase the antiretroviral drugs for patients who qualify for it, which they estimate to be 400 000 to 500 000 people.