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Local groups try to combat the rise of HIV infection in Japan

By Karryn Miller

TOKYO The statistics speak for themselves: 25 million dead, 33 million infected and 2 million new cases each — year. The global AIDS epidemic, which first reared its head 27 years ago, continues to spread around the globe. As governments and NPOs work together to lessen the impact, infection rates have slowed and the public's knowledge throughout the First World has increased — except in Japan.

According to a July 2008 report published by The Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS and the World Health Organization, Japan had the lowest HIV prevalence of the major developed countries. Yet in contrast to other nations, infection rates here have actually grown since 1996.

“The number of newly reported HIV cases is dramatically increasing, especially among men who have sex with men, and young people,” says Tsutomu Nemoto, an organizer of Japan’s upcoming World AIDS Day event.

“What’s also worrying is the increase in newly reported cases, meaning the virus wasn’t detected before it

developed into full-blown AIDS.

Why? Too often, HIV is viewed as an overseas problem. “How aware people are in Japan about AIDS varies from person to person,” Nemoto says. “Most people seem not to realize they can get HIV. When it comes to AIDS, some people imagine that it is a disease somewhere in Africa or that it affects a particular population, like gay people and/or sex workers.”

Indeed, the numbers are alarming. An NGO called Stop! STD o Kangaeru Kai conducted a survey of youths in Shibuya last year. Of the 466 Japanese high school students questioned, one in 17 had contracted a sexually transmitted infection (STI), and only half were aware that HIV/AIDs could be spread among people their age. According to “The Face of Global Sex 2008,” a report compiled by condom maker Durex, out of the 26 countries surveyed, Japan ranked 25th in terms of the general public’s knowledge about how to protect itself from STIs.

World AIDS Day (WADS), held around the globe on Dec 1, aims to raise awareness of the situation. “The theme of WADS 2008 in Japan is ‘Think & Link,’” explains Nemoto. “WADS is trying to link peoples’ daily lives and AIDS together by holding various events, including live music performances, distributing condoms in the middle of Shibuya, and organizing other activities throughout Japan.”

The bulk of these events will take place on Sunday, Nov 30, in the vicinity of Shibuya station. One of the highlights will be the Red Walk, with volunteers marching through the city’s streets handing out literature about the disease.

After WADS 2008 wraps up, there will still be a number of ways people can get information and help. Free, anonymous HIV testing is available at the public health center of each ward. Test dates and times are limited, however, making it necessary to contact your local center in advance. The Japanese Foundation for AIDS

Prevention also runs a 24-hour support line, with pre-recorded information about HIV/AIDS, as well as counseling, testing, treatment and more, in English and seven other languages.

See www.wadsjapan.net (Japanese only) for more information about WADS events. To volunteer or request English information, email toma@youthaidscoalition.org. The 24-hour, multilingual HIV/AIDS support hotline is 03-5940-2127.

This story originally appeared in Metropolis magazine (www.metropolis.co.jp).


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 [buggerlugs](#) at 09:44 AM JST - 27th November

the statistic have been there for anyone to see for years. Japanese salaryman goes on huhmm a golf trip to

Thailand comes back and infects his enjoykosai GF who in turn infects her teenage BF and on it goes. till the Japanese understand they are part of the human race and that they themselves are the carriers of this disease nothing will change. we are talking about a country where abortion is the common birth control and teens think it's normal to catch an STD.

 [tokyokawasaki](#) at 10:54 AM JST - 27th November

Quote from the article: "Of the 466 Japanese high school students questioned, one in 17 had contracted a sexually transmitted infection (STI), and only half were aware that HIV/AIDs could be spread among people their age".

WTF? They just might find out the hard way that 'ignorance isn't bliss'.

What happened to sex education? Come on education ministry, start educating and stop hiding the real facts of life and history. Your students are after all the future generation of Japan... Stop protecting like a nanny state and educate real facts....

 [fatloser](#) at 11:13 AM JST - 27th November

I don't GET IT!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! What is the rate of infection in Japan?? And.....AND.....Do only high school students get STDs?

What is the point of this article????????? It provides little other than generalizations and heresay!!!!!!!!!!!!

 [Osakadaz](#) at 01:02 PM JST - 27th November

W A D S . . . lol what a great name.Exactly the root of the problem.

 [sharky1](#) at 01:29 PM JST - 27th November

Nihao! Sounds like a conspiracy to wipe out the already declining Japanese population. Probably cheap, aids tainted condoms from China under the "buy one, get one free" plan.

 [ptolemy](#) at 03:39 PM JST - 27th November

Local groups have to because the National Government won't do anything. Aso will of course complain that he is paying taxes to keep HIV patients alive.

 [smithinjapan](#) at 06:37 PM JST - 27th November

The sex-ed videos they show kids date way back to before they even knew HIV existed.


I didn't know that 'STD' had changed to 'STI'. Interesting. The rate of people with infection and who die from infection is going to SKYROCKET much more than the numbers reported here. It'll take a LONG time and MANY deaths for the Japanese to come to terms with it, and even then they'll blame foreigners for bringing in the disease, but in the end they'll have to acknowledge it and join in the fight to combat it. Way too late, of course, but hey.

 [Farmboy](#) at 07:35 PM JST - 27th November

Nice that confidential and free testing is now available. Since most people in Japan haven't gotten tested, it's hard to know how bad the problem really is, and this may be the only way to come to grips with the problem, late though it may be. The reality will no doubt be a shock to many.

 [ataro](#) at 09:12 PM JST - 27th November

When I visited the hospital in Tokyo for high fever, first thing the nurse asked was whether I had sex with men and then did a HIV test. Is homosexuality that rampant in Japan? I know they are crazy about Hello Kitty, High School Girls etc. I am not sure about Gay population in Japan. Can anyone shed some light on this?

 [outofmydepth](#) at 05:33 AM JST - 28th November

it's the southeast asian sex tours.

 [zaichik](#) at 06:01 AM JST - 28th November

| Sounds like they need air Kamisama Mou Sukoshi Dake again.

Indeed.

I didn't know that 'STD' had changed to 'STI'. Interesting.

I think the idea is to reduce the stigma so people will actually bother getting tested. Not sure if it works....

Most (if not all) Japanese hospitals run tests for HIV, hepatitis and syphilis before patients are admitted for surgery, although I've not previously heard of people being quizzed about their sexual habits like ataro was.



[Badsey](#) at 07:21 AM JST - 28th November

if you are of any age and looking into sexual intercourse with another: -please get tested before you do so. Be responsible.

I am not one that condones risky sexual behaviour with others. -it's not worth it!

Please be careful and live careful, happy productives lives.



[jonnyboy](#) at 08:47 AM JST - 28th November

well if you actually look at the most high-risk groups for hiv/aids (the destitute and/or heavy/intravenous drug users) you'll notice that they aren't exactly the sort of people with healthy lifestyles. hmmm... that's interesting, isn't it?



[ptolemy](#) at 05:03 PM JST - 28th November

Right on Badsey! As my dearly sainted dad advised me "Wear a wet suit before taking the dive in". I only wish more dads would advise their sons and daughters of this. Condoms save many lives and prevent the spread of disease, they are not 100% effective, but it is better than nothing.



[jwills79](#) at 05:27 PM JST - 28th November

Playing devils advocate it is not only the Japanese men going on trips throughout Asia. It is also the ladies going abroad to Australia, USA, Canada and UK and finding holiday boyfriends. Not to mention some of the nasty Caucasian foreigners around Tokyo. Dipping in some of those same women people were talking about earlier. You

know the ones I am talking about.

The only difference between us and a large majority of Japanese when it comes to this issue is that we should know better. A lot are still ignorant to the issue.

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