

Tamil Nadu gets Rs.1 bn to step up HIV/AIDS prevention

Tamil Nadu has been given Rs.1 billion (\$25 million) from the National AIDS Control Programme (NACP) as its share to step up HIV/AIDS prevention and control at district level.

The state is now setting up district AIDS prevention and control units, headed by district collectors, to focus aggressively on prevention.

Making this announcement at the first district collectors' conference on the disease here, National AIDS Control Organisation (NACO) joint director Damodar Bachani said: 'The emphasis in the NACP phase three of the programme will be on prevention.'

Prevention and care strategies will be taken up at the district level across the country and NACP is now looking at the HIV/AIDS profile district by district, the official said.

Tamil Nadu, where the first AIDS case in India was detected in 1986, topped the list of high prevalence states in the 1990s. However, the last few years has seen this prevalence coming down to less than one percent.

'Tamil Nadu is the first state where district-wise profile of HIV/AIDS prevalence, sentinel surveillance, care and prevention strategies and their successes have been systematically mapped', Bachani told IANS.

Under the NACP, all Indian districts have been categorised according to HIV prevalence into A, B and C class districts.

'As many as 190 districts in the country are in A category. We know that these districts need urgent attention,' the official said.

The idea of getting the district collectors more actively involved in HIV/AIDS control is decentralisation, Bachani said.

Of Tamil Nadu's 31 districts, 22 are A category districts, five are in B category and four in C category. 'Collectors need to look at how the HIV/AIDS epidemic can be brought down in the A category districts,' Tamil Nadu State AIDS Control Society (TANSACS) director Supriya Sahu said.

The hotspots for HIV infection are 'subepidemic regions of Namakkal, Madurai, Tiruchirapally, Salem and Krishnagiri'. In these five districts prevalence is 0.7 percent.

Chief Secretary L.K. Tripathy, while inaugurating the workshop, announced that the state has set up a trust for care of children orphaned by AIDS, with a corpus of Rs.50 million (\$1.25 million).

Tamil Nadu Health Secretary V.K. Subburaj recalled some of the major AIDS control initiatives in the state like setting up 760 testing centres and more than 30 care hospitals.

Experts said two million people had come for voluntary HIV testing in 2007 in Tamil Nadu.

'Tamil Nadu has also targeted blood banks, completely stopping blood taking from professional

donors. Ninety percent of the blood from blood banks in this state will soon be from voluntary donors,' Subburaj said.

This move is expected to reduce HIV infection risks further.

Subburaj also called for urgent attention to lowering incidences of sexually transmitted diseases in the State, which was above 10 percent.

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