

Village health workers to get rapid HIV test kits in India

Thousands of village health workers across India will soon be equipped to conduct AIDS tests through rapid HIV test kits, which need just a prick on a person's fingertip and the results are known in 20 minutes.

"We have recently adopted the whole blood fingerprick testing technology (WBFTT) and have piloted the project in a few districts. We hope it will be rolled out across the country by early 2009," said Ajay Khera, joint director of National Aids Control Organisation (NACO).

NACO is the apex agency under the union health ministry to curb, control, treat HIV/AIDS. It spreads awareness among people about HIV/AIDS through information and education campaigns.

"This will allow the Auxiliary Nurse Midwife (ANMs) visiting families in rural India to conduct HIV tests on people willing to do it. I am sure, it will revolutionise the concept of AIDS testing and help give a better picture of the disease," Khera told IANS.

He said since the health workers have good relations with the villagers and have access to families, equipping them for HIV tests would go a long way in reducing fear of the disease.

"If ANMs finds some one positive, then the person can come to the nearby integrated counselling and testing centre (ICTC) for a confirmed tests and further counselling," he explained.

Currently India is home to at least 2.5 million HIV/AIDS patients and there are nearly 4,500 ICTC centres.

The new technology does not require separating serum and red blood cells from the blood sample, as is the practice now.

"This will help save time and reduce workload at ICTCs."

At present people are called to the testing centre, counselled and then their blood samples are collected. They are then asked to come the next day to collect their report.

"But with the new technology, we can save much time," Khera added.

He said a pilot project to study its effectiveness is being conducted in 10 districts of Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. "As soon as the pilot project's results come in, it will be rolled out across the country."

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