

Russia HIV infections rise 5% in 2011: official

March 12 2012

Russia in 2011 saw a rise of five percent in the number of new HIV infections to 62,000 cases amid worrying signs that heterosexuals and women are increasingly at risk, its chief doctor said Monday.

"In 2011, 62,000 new infections were recorded in the country," said Gennady Onishchenko, the head of Russia's sanitary protection agency, quoted by Russian news agencies.

He said that over 600,000 cases of [HIV infection](#) had been recorded in Russia since 1987, although this number is far lower than an estimate by the United Nations that 980,000 people have been infected with the virus in Russia.

He expressed concern that women were increasingly being exposed to the virus and said that in 13 regions of Russia more than half of HIV infections were of women.

Onishchenko said that transmission of the virus between [heterosexuals](#) was on the rise and now accounted for 39.9 percent of infections. However most new infections, 57.6 percent, were still caused in [intravenous drug](#) injections.

Russia has long been criticised by international agencies for failing to spend money properly on anti-HIV programmes and not targeting groups most at risk like drug users, homosexuals and [sex workers](#).

Andrei Zlobin, the head of Russia's HIV victims association, said that the whole fight against the virus in the country was marked by a lack of efficiency, with contradictory statistics and a lack of a government strategy.

"The big question is why a country which spends so much materially lacks such efficiency," he told AFP.

The fight against HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, is a major social battle for the Russian authorities in a region where the infection is spreading five times faster than the global average.

But activists have long said that the fight is being impeded by a continued [social stigma](#) against the high risk groups like homosexuals and [drug users](#).

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