



[Home](#) [News](#) [Sport](#) [Radio](#) [TV](#) [Weather](#) [Languages](#)

UK version **International version** | [About the versions](#)

[Low graphics](#) | [Accessibility help](#)



The News in 2 minutes

News services
Your news when you want it



News Front Page



- [Africa](#)
- [Americas](#)
- [Asia-Pacific](#)
- [Europe](#)
- [Middle East](#)
- [South Asia](#)
- [UK](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Health](#)
- [Medical notes](#)
- [Science/Nature](#)
- [Technology](#)
- [Entertainment](#)
-
- [Video and Audio](#)
-
- [Have Your Say](#)
- [In Pictures](#)
- [Country Profiles](#)
- [Special Reports](#)

Last Updated: Saturday, 3 February 2007, 02:01 GMT

Expert doubts widespread HIV risk

HIV/Aids campaigners are circulating "misconceptions" about who is at risk, a former World Health Organization expert has warned.



Intravenous drug users are a key high-risk group

Dr James Chin was head of a WHO Global Programme on Aids unit from 1987-1992.

In a new book, he says people in the general population outside Africa are unlikely to contract HIV/Aids, as it is restricted to certain high-risk groups.

Campaigners have promoted a message of safer sex which involves the use of condoms for protection.

UK experts said Dr Chin's views were inaccurate, and misrepresented current thinking among HIV/Aids bodies.

Dr Chin says HIV prevalence is low in most populations throughout the world and can be expected to remain low.

“ He is overstating his case ”
Lisa Power, Terrence Higgins Trust

He believes this is not because of effective HIV prevention work, but because infection rates are limited by the numbers in groups whose behaviour puts them at high risk.

Dr Chin says it is only in sub-Saharan Africa, where unprotected sex outside marriage is common, that the risk of heterosexual HIV transmission is high.

In other parts of the world, he says HIV is seen only in men who have sex with other men, intravenous drug users and female sex workers.

And he says that, unless the clients or partners of people in these groups also indulge in high-risk behaviour, the virus will not spread.

'Difficult to transmit'

However Dr Chin says these facts have been "minimised and ignored" by UNAids and Aids activists because it is "politically and socially more acceptable" to say HIV risk behaviours are present in all populations.



LATEST NEWS

- [HIV 'afflicting global workforce'](#)
- [India the HIV 'global epicentre'](#)
- [Gates gives \\$287m for research](#)
- [HIV infections 'may have peaked'](#)
- [Children missing out on HIV drugs](#)
- [HIV origin 'found in wild chimps'](#)

FEATURES



Russia's children
HIV-positive children face a bleak future in Russia, the BBC's Emma Simpson finds

- ['Why I abstain from sex'](#)
- ['I am not afraid of Aids'](#)
- [Hope amid Malawi's Aids crisis](#)
- ['Bug chasers': Fantasy or fact?](#)
- ['My life with HIV'](#)

BACKGROUND

- [Timeline: 25 years of HIV/Aids](#)
- [The biology of Aids](#)
- [HIV guide: Region-by-region](#)

VIDEO AND AUDIO

TV reports

HAVE YOUR SAY

[What could combat Aids?](#)

Bill Clinton Q&A

RELATED INTERNET LINKS

- [Terrence Higgins Trust](#)
- [Tha Aids Pandemic by Dr James Chin](#)
- [UNAids](#)

The BBC is not responsible for the content of external internet sites

TOP HEALTH STORIES

- [Car drivers 'risking skin cancer'](#)
- [Men's testicles 'HIV hiding spot'](#)
- [Tests show bird flu is H5N1 virus](#)
- [News feeds](#)

MOST POPULAR STORIES NOW

[US ex-generals reject Iran strike](#)
[Middle East: An end to US primacy?](#)

RELATED BBC SITES

- [SPORT](#)
- [WEATHER](#)
- [ON THIS DAY](#)
- [EDITORS' BLOG](#)

Writing in "The Aids Pandemic", Dr Chin says: "These activists do not want to further stigmatise persons or population groups who have such high risk levels of HIV risk behaviours and who are already marginalised.

"By refusing to accept the fact that HIV is very difficult to transmit sexually without the highest levels of sexual risk behaviours, Aids programmes have avoided labelling some populations as being more promiscuous than others.

"It is a much more socially and politically correct public health message to say that sexual promiscuity exists in all populations and thus the risk of epidemic heterosexual HIV transmission to the general public, or to ordinary people can be prevented only by aggressive programmes directed at the general population, and especially to youth."

He cited studies which showed the risk of someone in the general population of contracting HIV from any single sexual act was, at the highest estimate, one in 1,000.

And he says the failure to recognise this means that scarce public health resources in countries where HIV prevalence is low are being wasted on prevention programmes being targeted at the public, when it is the high-risk groups who should be targeted.

'Disservice'

Dr Purnima Mane, director of policy evidence and partnerships at UNAids said: "Without having access to the full text of the book, it is very difficult for UNAids to comment on it."

But she said: "The Aids response has always invited a high-level of debate and discussion. UNAids welcomes this debate and stands by its scientific approach.

"Twenty-five years into the Aids epidemic has shown the world how the epidemic has continued to evolve and how the response must also evolve.

Dr Mane added: "UNAids data is not influenced by political or fundraising agendas."

Lisa Power, head of policy at the UK's Terrence Higgins Trust said Dr Chin's views may have been accurate 10 to 15 years ago, but were not true now.

"He is overstating his case. Sub-Saharan Africa is not the only place to have heterosexual epidemics and most AIDS activists no longer espouse a one-size-fits-all approach to HIV prevention work.

"Some authorities are wrong to misrepresent their HIV epidemiology in order to maximise public interest in the issue.

"But Chin is doing a similar disservice by misrepresenting

[Baghdad market bomb 'kills 130'](#)
[Addicts brave withdrawal trial](#)
[YouTube asked to 'remove' videos](#)

[Most popular now, in detail](#)

current HIV planning and thinking in order to maximise public interest in his book."

Ms Power said there was a need for campaigns targeted at high-risk groups and more general information to ensure better public understanding of HIV and sexual health in order to tackle the stigma surrounding the disease."

The Aids Pandemic: the collision of epidemiology with political correctness is published by Radcliffe Publishing at £27.50.

 [E-mail this to a friend](#)

 [Printable version](#)

FEATURES, VIEWS, ANALYSIS



End of US primacy?
US actions in the Middle East bring unintended results



Beating heroin
Six addicts take part in a controversial brain stimulation trial



India rising
But can it finally deliver on promises of future greatness?

PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

[E-mail news](#) [Mobiles](#) [Alerts](#) [News feeds](#) [Podcasts](#)

Most Popular Now | Traffic to this site is currently at a normal level

[Back to top](#) ^^

[Help](#) | [Privacy and cookies policy](#) | [News sources](#) | [About the BBC](#) | [Contact us](#)