

CARIBBEAN

Adult HIV prevalence in the Caribbean is estimated at 1.0% [0.9%–1.2%] in 2007. Prevalence in this region is highest in the Dominican Republic and Haiti, which together account for nearly three quarters of the 230 000 [210 000–270 000] people living with HIV in the Caribbean, including the 17 000 [15 000–23 000] who were newly infected in 2007. An estimated 11 000 [9800–18 000] people in the Caribbean died of AIDS in this year and AIDS remains one of the leading causes of death among persons aged 25 to 44 years.

The primary mode of HIV transmission in this region is sexual intercourse, with unprotected sex between sex workers and clients a significant factor in the transmission of HIV. Among female sex workers, HIV prevalence of 3.5% has been found in the **Dominican Republic**, 9% in **Jamaica** and 31% in **Guyana** (Gupta et al., 2006; Secretaria de Estado de Salud Pública y Asistencia Social de República Dominicana, 2005b; PAHO, 2007; Gebre et al., 2006; Allen et al., 2006).

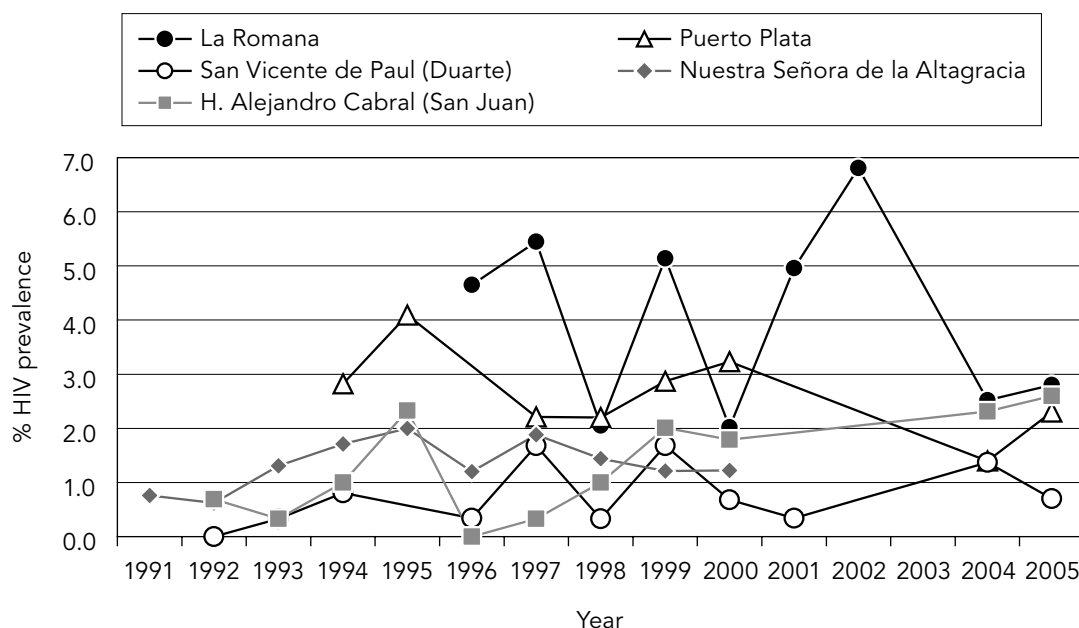
Unsafe injecting drug use is responsible for a minority of HIV infections, and contributes significantly to the spread of HIV only in Bermuda and Puerto Rico. Unsafe sex between men is a significant factor in this region but is largely hidden because of associated stigma. Little research has been conducted in the Caribbean among men who have sex with men, but the available data suggest that about 12% of reported HIV infections are the result of unsafe sex between men (Caribbean Commission on Health and Development, 2005; Inciardi, Syvertsen & Surratt, 2005).

Haiti still accounts for the largest HIV burden in the Caribbean. Among pregnant women attending antenatal clinics, HIV prevalence declined from 5.9% in 1996 to 3.1% in 2004

(Gaillard et al., 2006). However, results of sentinel surveillance among pregnant women in 2006 show a stabilization in HIV prevalence (Ministère de la Santé Publique et de la Population, 2007). A national population-based survey estimated adult national prevalence at 2.2% in 2005 (Cayemittes et al., 2006). The declining trend is largely related to decreasing infection levels in the capital, Port-au-Prince, and other cities, where HIV prevalence among 15–44-year-old women fell from 5.5% to 3% between 2000 and 2005. Modelling of the epidemic indicates that besides mortality, protective behaviour changes were at least partly responsible for those declines (Gaillard et al., 2006). Behavioural surveys have shown a 20% drop in the mean number of sexual partners between 1994 and 2000, while condom use increased, especially during sex with non-regular partners (Cayemittes et al., 2006; Hallet et al., 2006; Gaillard et al., 2006).

The HIV epidemic in the **Dominican Republic** appears to have stabilized (see Figure 13) (Secretaria de Estado de Salud Pública y Asistencia Social de República Dominicana, 2007). As in most other countries of the Caribbean, commercial sex is a key factor in the epidemic. One study found that condom use increased from 75% to 94% in 12 months among sex workers

HIV prevalence among pregnant women in the Dominican Republic, 1991–2005



Source: Ministry of Health surveillance reports, 1991–2006.

Figure 13

who participated in a community solidarity prevention project in the capital, Santo Domingo (Kerrigan et al., 2006).

The HIV epidemics in **Jamaica**, the **Bahamas**, and **Trinidad and Tobago** have also been stable over recent years (Ministry of Health Jamaica, 2007; Ministry of Health The Bahamas, 2006; PAHO & WHO, 2006; Ministry of Health Trinidad and Tobago, 2007).

In **Barbados**, the number of persons newly diagnosed with HIV each year has remained relatively stable since the late 1990s (Ministry of Health Barbados, 2007).

HIV transmission in **Guyana**, is occurring primarily through unprotected sexual intercourse.

The latest antenatal clinic survey shows HIV prevalence of 1.6% among pregnant women. This is lower than the 2.3% prevalence found in a similar survey in 2004, but due to methodological differences, comparing the two sets of data should be done with caution. (Ministry of Health Guyana, 2007).

In contrast to the rest of the region, injecting drug use is the key factor in HIV transmission in Bermuda and Puerto Rico. Very high HIV prevalence is still being found among injecting drug users in Puerto Rico, where the rate of HIV infection (26 per 100 000) is twice that of the United States mainland and where more than two thirds of HIV infections have been among men (AIDS Action, 2007).