



These are some of the most important events that have occurred in the history of AIDS over the period 1998-1999. Information about events in the year 2001 can be found on the [News page](#)

## 1998 History

In Canada there was an outbreak of HIV infection amongst injecting drug users in Vancouver.

In some countries HIV +ve people were able to return to work as a result of the improvement in their health due to combination therapy drug treatment. However, some people began to be affected by quite severe side effects of the drugs. These side effects known as Lipodystrophy began to cast doubt on the long term safety of combination therapy.

Glaxo Wellcome cut the price of AZT by 75% after a trial in Thailand showed it's effectiveness in preventing mother-to-child transmission. However, even with this price cut it was expected that the drug would still be far too expensive for us in many developing countries.

In the UK the London Lighthouse charity closed its residential unit.

Jonathan Mann, the first director of the Global Program on AIDS, died in the crash of Swissair flight 111, along with his wife the AIDS researcher Mary-Lou Clements-Mann.

The former French prime minister Laurent Fabius, was brought to trial, but acquitted in May 1999, for allegedly delaying the screening of donated blood

In June the company AIDSVax started the first human trial of an AIDS vaccine using 5,000 volunteers from across the USA.

The FDA gave approval for various new drugs including Sustiva (efavirenz), another drug in the NNRTI group.

In South Africa, Gugu Diamini, an AIDS activist, was beaten to death by her neighbours after revealing her HIV positive status on Zulu television. This happened just a month after Deputy President Thabo Mbeki had called for people to "break the silence about AIDS" in order to defeat the epidemic.

UNAIDS estimated that during the year a further 5.8 million people became infected with HIV, half of them being under 25. It was also estimated that 70% of all new infections and 80% of all deaths were occurring in sub-Saharan Africa.

## 1999 History

In the UK the number of HIV positive prisoners reached an all time high.

In the United States a doctor who injected his former lover with AIDS infected blood, was sentenced to 50 years in prison.

A group of researchers at the University of Alabama, claimed to have discovered that a particular type of chimpanzee, once common in West Central Africa, was the source of HIV.

According to the annual World health Report, AIDS had become the fourth biggest killer world-wide, only twenty years after the epidemic began.

The Ugandan ministry of health started a voluntary door-to-door HIV screening programme in an effort to check the AIDS epidemic that had claimed the lives of 700,000 people in the country. Since 1986 the Ugandan government had implemented a number of successful initiatives, and whereas in 1992 it was estimated that 30% of people in Kamplala were HIV positive, by 1999 the figure had been reduced to 12%.

In the UK a judge ordered that a five month old baby girl should be tested for HIV against her parents' wishes

South Africa won the first round in it's battle with the United States and multinational pharmaceutical companies to force a cut in drugs prices.

Initial findings from a joint Uganda-US study identified a new drug regimen, a single oral does of the antiretroviral drug nevirapine, as being both more affordable and effective in reducing mother to baby transmission of HIV.

Vaccine development suffered a setback with the news that people infected with a weakened form of HIV more than 17 years ago are now showing signs of AIDS.

Russia's official AIDS prevention centre reported a twelve-fold increase in new HIV cases in Moscow.

By the end of 1999, UNAIDS estimated that 33 million people around the world were living with HIV/AIDS.

## 2000 History



## News

### **HIV Muppet 'not for US'** 18/07/02

American's PBS TV network has confirmed it has no plans to introduce an HIV-positive Muppet to its new episodes of Sesame Street. Republican politicians in the US Congress were outraged over the possible introduction of the character, who will appear in the South African version of the show. However Pat Mitchell, president of the PBS network, has said that the character is intended for South African audiences only. In a letter to Republican politician WJ Tauzin, Mitchell said the new Muppet has been developed by production house Sesame Workshop in

conjunction with South African educators and the US Agency for International Development, and is not intended for the American market. Tauzin aide Ken Johnson said the politician was satisfied with the response. "We had a real simple argument - let kids be kids," he said. "They are going to grow up fast enough. They are going to learn about Aids, world famine and terrorism soon enough. Why can't they laugh and play for a while?" The female, HIV-infected Muppet, who will debut on the show on September 30, aims to reduce prejudice against people with the HIV virus or Aids.

(News item from 'BBC News Online', 17/07/02)

### **Humans have anti-HIV gene** 15/07/02

Humans possess a gene which acts as a defence against infection by HIV, scientists have found. They hope the discovery could lead to new treatments for HIV and Aids, badly needed as current medications become increasingly impotent. Scientists found that the HIV virus would interfere with the normal operation of the gene, called CEM15, by producing a protein called Vif. But they found that once this protein had been removed from the HIV virus, the CEM15 gene was able to effectively stop the HIV virus from replicating. The study was carried out by Professor Michael Malim at King's College London, and a team from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine. They said scientists had already known that Vif plays an essential part in ensuring HIV replication, but before now its precise functions had been unclear.

Professor Malim said: "These are very significant findings and could open the door to new treatments for HIV/Aids in the future. "If we can find a way to block the action of Vif, it would allow CEM15 to work properly and prevent HIV from spreading." When a virus such as HIV infects a cell, it basically hijacks the cell's entire biochemical machinery, turning it into a factory that churns out new viruses. These viruses then go on to infect and kill other

cells and so the cycle continues. Future research will focus on identifying substances that can block the action of the Vif protein. Current treatments for HIV involve using a combination of drugs to target separate elements in the virus's life cycle. However, these drugs do not lead to the total disappearance of the virus. HIV has also developed resistance to the drugs in about half of patients. Professor Malim hopes that his work will lead to new treatments in the next ten years.

(News item from 'BBC News Online', 14/07/02)

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