

The United Nations AIDS organization released disturbing estimates Thursday of the seemingly relentless expansion of the HIV pandemic.

At a time when many Americans are increasingly optimistic that state-of-the-art drug therapy might eliminate the virus, HIV is taking a heavy toll worldwide.

According to the agency, every minute of every day somewhere in the world, six people become infected with HIV: 7,500 adults per day and 1,000 children. About 30 million people have acquired the virus during the last 15 years; 6.4 million of them have died of AIDS.

Behind this mounting death count are the signs of growing social disruption. For example, in sub-Saharan Africa, more than 1 million children have lost their parents to AIDS. And within four years, there will be more than 2 million AIDS orphans in the following seven countries combined: Dominican Republic, Kenya, Rwanda, Thailand, Uganda, the United States, and Zambia.

Illness and death among young adults due to HIV have reached such proportions in some countries that overall national economics and productivity are affected. In Uganda, for example, 44 percent of all premature deaths are attributable to AIDS. In terms of years of labor productivity, AIDS is responsible for more than 66 percent of Uganda's economically significant losses.

The virus is also spreading into new areas. For example:

-During the last three years, HIV-infection rates among Vietnamese prostitutes jumped from 9 percent to 38 percent.

-Infection rates among blood donors in the Cambodian capital of Phnom Penh have soared from 0.1 percent to more than 10 percent.

-In the Ukrainian Black Sea port of Nikolayev, HIV-infection rates among narcotics users exploded in 1995, jumping from a 1.7 percent in January to 56.5 percent in November.

-South Africa, long spared, is now being overrun. Tests of pregnant women in the province of Kwazulu/Natal show a jump from 9.6 percent to 18 percent.

In my opinion, I think that all the scientists of the world should get together and try to devise a cure for HIV and AIDS. It may take time, and it may take money; but I think it is worth it in order to save mankind from extinction and total annihilation.

