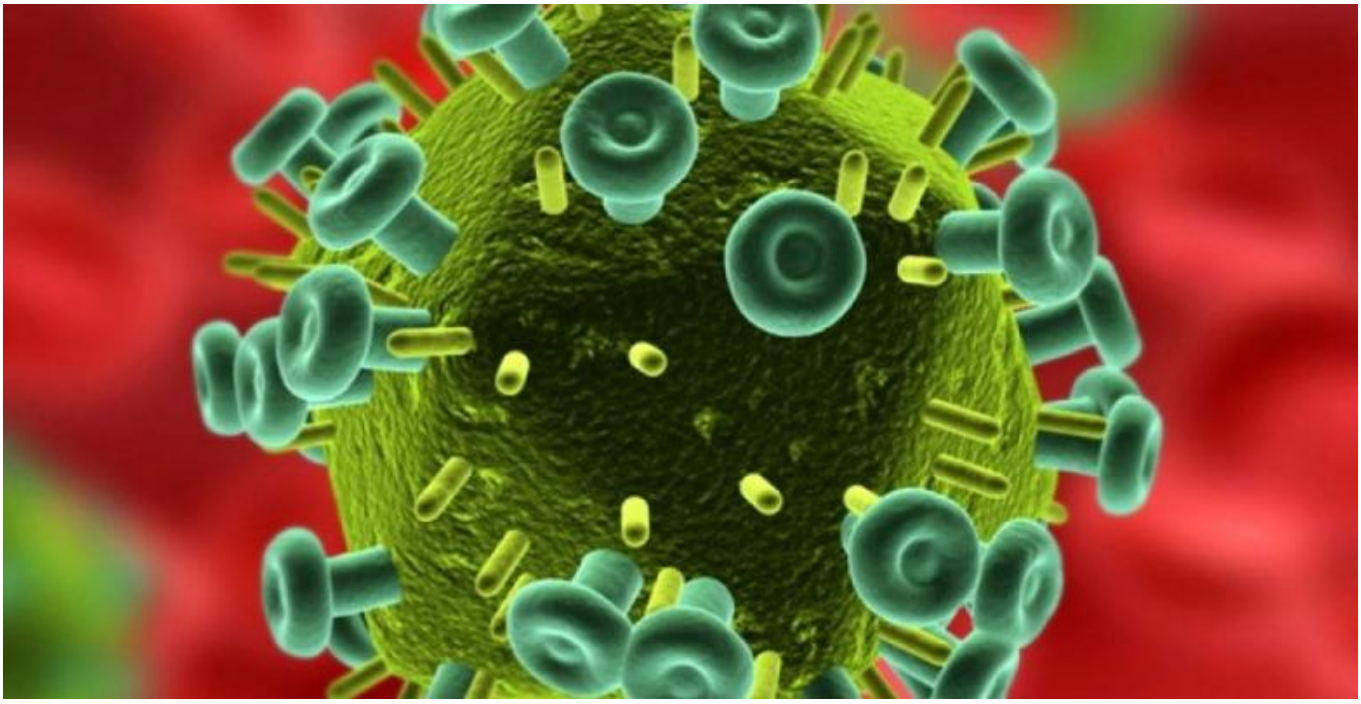
HIV: Until it Happens

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HIV risk awareness in Cuba is low. Despite the stability in the figures of new infections, it’s necessary to keep working in the effective protection against the epidemic.

It doesn't happen until it happens, that simple. HIV risk awareness in Cuba is still low. Most of the new infected people are related with that circumstance.

I will be spared—it seems to be the instinct.

According to sources at the Ministry of Public Health, the largest incidence is among youths between 20-29 years, mainly men who have had sex with other men.

Propaganda campaigns are plentiful in television, radio and other media… still many have sexual relationships without wearing condoms.

The figures speak for themselves: 1 600 new patients receive antiretroviral therapy in 2014. There is not a great increase in comparison to last year, but the amount is considerable.

A question arises: is there disinformation about this subject? This doesn't seem to be the case. Instruction levels in Cuba are high; most of the population has full access to the media.

Most of those infected simply trusted, thought they would be spared, they didn't take the elementary protective measures.

The domestic panorama indicates that the epidemic makes no discrimination among cultural or economic levels; but a large number of the new patients are men who had had sex with other men, many times at meeting places, in situations that at times invite negligence.

The situation is complicated, it has many angles.

Many of the men found in meeting places do it because they don't have other places to have sex.

And others—and this is a figure not to discard—do it for the mere pleasure of living the fling.

These practices are hard “to control”. The attempt of controlling them could carry out even incomprehension and irregularities of the authorities involved.

It’s clear that the educational campaigns have overlooked this fact.

It’s really striking the candor of many of the messages and posters. For the poorly informed spectator, watching the everyday characters on the television spots, the HIV problem in Cuba is manifested equally in men and women.

The actions must be more intentional, it’s necessary to identify a public, at least on the media.

Obviously, the epidemic doesn't distinguish genders, sexual orientation (regrettably many still think HIV is only a thing for homosexuals), but it’s indispensable to be more kin in health promoting programs.

To achieve this goal a few prejudicial barriers must be broken in our people.

Past beyond the recommendations on the relevancy of certain sex practices—that at present can or can’t regarded—, the most effective means of protection is still wearing a condom.

Condoms distribution has faced specific problems in the last months in drugstores, but the figures show that infections are not directly related with this shortage, but with the lack of culture on the use of the condom.

A total of 11.400 Cubans infected with HIV or who have developed AIDS receive antiretroviral treatment at the moment in the island.

The need is large, but sometimes it is necessary to struggle with the shortage of some medications.

The head of the department for Prevention and Control of STD/AIDS at ***Minsap***, María Isela Lantero, pointed out in statement to Prensa Latina that Cuba has passed a national plan of response for the next five years, following WHO’s recommendations.

That entity advises that antiretroviral treatment begins in the earliest stages in the disease, hence the importance of a quick detection.

Despite many people’s reticence to undergo traditional services for HIV testing, this year more than two million tests have been carried out to detect the virus.

The presence of HIV /Aids in the country is 0, 12%, in the population group of 15-49 years. At first sight this might seem a moderate figure, but the fact that the tendency remains stable makes us rethink some strategies.

The goal, although farfetched d, is that the number of new infections come closer to zero.

Contrary to other epidemics, HIV control does count with true means and sure at some extent.

It is mostly a matter of education. The challenge is settled.