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## HIV epidemic emerging in Middle East

The AIDS virus is spreading like an epidemic in some Middle East and North African countries because of homosexual encounters between men, a study warned yesterday.

"This systematic review and data synthesis indicate that HIV epidemics appear to be emerging among MSM (men who have sex with men) in at least a few MENA countries," said a study published in *PLoS Medicine*.

The study, titled "Are HIV Epidemics among Men Who Have Sex with Men Emerging in the Middle East and North Africa?", warned the levels "could already be in a concentrated state among several MSM groups".

It showed the rates of HIV infection among MSM in some countries have exceeded the five per cent threshold which defines concentrated epidemics, namely in Egypt, Sudan and Tunisia.

The study put the rates of HIV infection among MSM in Egypt's main cities of Cairo and Alexandria at 5.7 per cent and 5.9 per cent respectively, while the rate among receptive MSM in Sudan's capital reached 9.3 per cent.

Tunisia's total rate was put at 4.9 per cent, ranging between 0.8 and 6.3 per cent in three regions.

"There is an urgent need to expand HIV surveillance and access to HIV testing, prevention, and treatment services," the study said. — AFP