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# Early HIV treatment can save 'millions'

**LONDON:** Doctors could save three million more lives worldwide by 2025 if they offer AIDS drugs to people with human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) sooner after they test positive for the virus, the World Health Organisation said yesterday.

While better access to cheap generic AIDS drugs means many more people are now getting treatment, health workers, particularly in poor countries with limited health budgets, tend to wait until the infection has progressed.

But in new guidelines aimed at controlling and reducing the global AIDS epidemic, the United Nations health agency said about 26 million HIV-positive people, or about 80 per cent of all those with the virus, should be getting drug treatment.

The guidelines, which set a global standard for when people with HIV should start anti-retroviral treatment, were drawn up after numer-

ous studies found that treating HIV patients earlier could keep them healthy for many years and also lowered the amount of virus in the blood, significantly cutting their risk of infecting someone else.

"We are raising the bar to 26 million people," said Gottfried Hirnschall, WHO's HIV/AIDS department director.

"And this is not only about keeping people healthy and alive, but also about blocking further transmission of HIV."

Some 34 million people worldwide carried HIV virus that caused AIDS and the majority of them live in poor and developing countries.

Swift progress had also been made in getting more HIV patients into treatment, with 9.7 million people getting life-saving AIDS drugs last year, up from just 300,000 people a decade earlier, according to latest WHO data yesterday. **Reuters**