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## Imperiled by drug abuse

A RISE in drug abuse, especially heroin, in eastern and southern Africa is threatening advances made there in bringing HIV and AIDS infections under control, experts said.

"I think one of our largest concerns in Kenya is the large number of people who are addicted to heroin, and many of them are actually injecting themselves," said Jennifer Kimani, who heads up Kenya's National Campaign Against Drug Abuse.

"Among the injecting drug users, 68 to 88 per cent are HIV positive," she said.

A clear increase in the number of addicts, she lamented, was threatening to "reverse the gains that our country has actually achieved in the area of controlling HIV and AIDS."

"It's a very worrying situation." Olawale Maiyegun, the head of the African Union's Social Affairs Department, agreed.

"It is feared that the next round of an HIV/AIDS epidemic might be (prompted) by drug injection," he said, lamenting the lack of research into how rampant the drug abuse is.

"We need to look at what the prevalent rate is," he said. An increase in other forms of substance abuse, especially cannabis and legal and illegal alcohol consumption, was also casting a shadow over advances made to rein in the deadly diseases, Kimani said.

"The rising cases of the uptake of drugs and alcohol has led to a higher level of unsafe sex," she said.