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AIDS battle continues

Millions have been saved, but hurdles remain as World AIDS Day is observed.

By ANN M. SIMMONS

IN just six months between January and June, an additional one million HIV-infected people gained access to lifesaving treatment, according to figures announced in conjunction with World AIDS Day.

The news came as several promising studies of drugs that could hasten the elimination of the disease are headed toward preliminary human trials.

According to the United Nations Programme on AIDS (UNAIDS), huge progress has been made since 2000 and millions of lives have been saved, "but there are still important milestones to reach, barriers to break, and frontiers to cross," the agency said.

Data released by UNAIDS show that many countries are doubling down on efforts to treat and limit the spread of the virus, but their actions need to be sustained and increased in order to achieve the UN goal of ending the AIDS epidemic across the globe by 2030.

In June, the United States marked 35 years since the US

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported the first cases of a puzzling illness that was initially thought to primarily afflict gay men and would eventually become the global pandemic known as HIV/AIDS.

Fear and panic and misunderstanding ensued. Today, awareness about the disease is widespread, and effective treatment is helping those with HIV to extend their lives.

Here are some facts and figures from UNAIDS from 2015 and 2016.

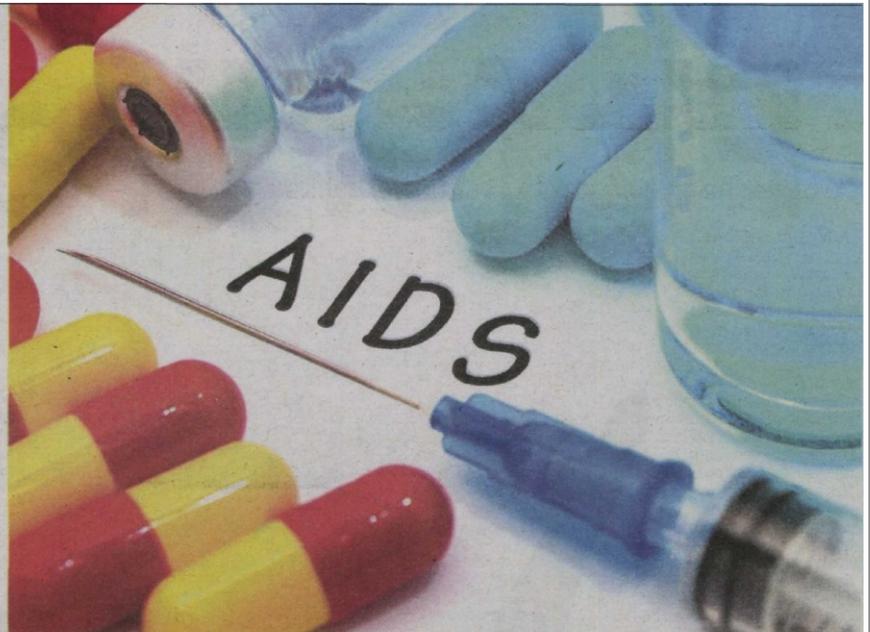
36.7 million: The number of people living with HIV across the globe.

18.2 million: The number of people accessing life-saving antiretroviral medicines as of June 2016.

The figure has more than doubled since 2010, when about 7.5 million people had access to such treatment.

19 million: The number of HIV-positive people in eastern and southern Africa – the world's most affected regions.

Of those, some 10 million have access to antiretroviral therapy.



As of June 2016, 18.2 million are on life-saving antiretroviral medicines. — AFP

In 2010, only 24% were receiving treatment.

Botswana, Eritrea, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Rwanda, South Africa, Swaziland, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe all increased treatment coverage by more than 25% between 2010 and 2015.

2.1 million: The estimated number of new HIV infections among adults worldwide in 2015, down from 2.2 million in 2010.

Eastern Europe and Central Asia have seen an increase in new

infections.

Russia has the largest HIV epidemic in the region, with more than 100,000 new HIV infections reported by the government in 2015, according to UNAIDS.

The agency estimates that 1.5 million people were living with HIV in Eastern Europe and Central Asia in 2015, up from one million in 2010.

35 million: The number of people who have died from AIDS-related illnesses since the start of the pandemic, out of the more

than 70 million people infected with the HIV virus, according to the World Health Organization.

Last year, 1.1 million people died worldwide, compared with 2 million in 2005.

\$19 billion (RM84.56 billion): The amount of funding allocated for the global HIV response in 2015.

2030: The year the global community is committed to ending the HIV/AIDS pandemic. — Los Angeles Times/Tribune News Service