

AstraZeneca asthma drug fails

# 10-year lifespan gain for some HIV patients: study

PARIS, May 11, (Agencies): The life expectancy of HIV-infected people in Europe and the United States has been boosted by a decade since anti-AIDS drugs became available in the mid-1990s, researchers said Thursday.

In fact, a 20-year-old who began treatment any time since 2008, now has an expected lifespan, about 78 years, approaching that of an uninfected person, said a study in The Lancet HIV.

Life expectancy in the "general population", excluding people infected with the AIDS-causing virus, is 79 years for men and 85 for women in France, and 78 for men and 82 for women in the United States, said the researchers.

People who started taking antiretroviral treatment (ART) in 2008 or thereafter lived longer, healthier lives than those who started treatment in earlier years, they added.

This was likely because modern drugs have fewer toxic side-effects, there are now more options for people with a drug-resistant HIV strain, and better treatment of other infections and conditions.

"With the perception that HIV-positive people will live into old age, clinicians are screening for and treating comorbidities (diseases on top of HIV) more aggressively," said the paper.

These included heart disease, hepatitis C and cancer.

Conducted in Europe and America, the study included data on more than 88,000 HIV patients.

"Information about life expectancy in people living with HIV and the knowledge that it could be approach-



A Yemeni man suspected of being infected with cholera receives treatment at a hospital in Sanaa on May 10. Thirty-four people have died of cholera-related causes and more than 2,000 have been taken ill in Yemen, as humanitarian organisations warned on May 9 that the outbreak could spiral out of control. (AFP)

ing that of the general population is important to motivate at-risk individuals to test for HIV and convince those infected to start ART immediately," said the study.

It could also "decrease stigmatisation of people living with HIV and help them to obtain insurance or employment".

ART, a cocktail of three or more drugs that block the virus from replicating, first became widely used in 1996.

It does not cure the disease, and treatment is lifelong.

The World Health Organization recommends that ART be started in all

people as soon as possible after diagnosis.

Many people in poorer nations are diagnosed too late, if at all, and treatment is not always readily available or affordable.

The scientists said the improvements were likely to be largely due to the transition to less toxic medicine combinations, with more drug options for people infected with drug-resistant HIV strains, and better adherence to treatment.

Also:

**NEW YORK:** An experimental biotech drug for severe asthma from AstraZeneca failed to meet its goal of significantly reducing attacks in a late-stage study, dealing a blow to an approach that had already run into problems at Roche.

Economic crisis hits citizens' health

## Infant mortality, malaria soar in Venezuela

CARACAS, May 11, (RTRS): Venezuela's infant mortality rose 30 percent last year, maternal mortality shot up 65 percent and cases of malaria jumped 76 percent, according to government data, sharp increases reflecting how the country's deep economic crisis has hammered at citizens' health.

The statistics, issued on the ministry's website after nearly two years of data silence from President Nicolas Maduro's leftist government, also showed a jump in illnesses such as diphtheria and Zika. It was not immediately clear when the ministry posted the data, although local media reported on the statistics on Tuesday.

Recession and currency controls in the oil-exporting South American nation have slashed both local production and im-

ports of foreign goods, and Venezuelans are facing shortages of everything from rice to vaccines. The opposition has organized weeks of protests against Maduro, accusing him of dictatorial rule and calling for elections.

In the health sector, doctors have emigrated in droves and patients have to settle for second-rate treatment or none at all. A leading pharmaceutical association has said roughly 85 percent of medicines are running short. Venezuelans often barter medicine, post pleas on social media, travel to neighboring countries if they can afford it, or line up for hours at pharmacies.

The Health Ministry had stopped releasing figures after July 2015, amid a wider data blackout. It was not clear why it published this latest batch of data.

Its statistics for 2016 showed infant mortality, or death of children aged 0-1, climbed 30.12 percent to 11,466 cases last year. The report cited neonatal sepsis, pneumonia, respiratory distress syndrome, and prematurity as the main causes.

Hospitals often lack basic equipment like incubators, and pregnant women are struggling to eat well, including taking folic acid, factors that can affect a baby's health.

Maternal mortality, or death while pregnant or within 42 days of the end of a pregnancy, was also up, rising 65.79 percent to 756 deaths, the report said.

The Health Ministry did not respond to a request for further information. Maduro's government says a coup-mongering elite is hoarding medicines to stoke unrest.

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Secretary-General Antonio Guterres is set to name senior British foreign aid official Mark Lowcock as the new UN aid chief, UN officials and diplomats said on Wednesday.

Lowcock, who currently heads Britain's Department for International Development, will replace Stephen O'Brien, who was appointed by previous UN chief Ban Ki-moon in March 2015. Lowcock has worked for the British aid department since 1985.

UNITED NATIONS: United Nations

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