

AIDS, malaria offset health gains in Africa: report



Fri May 26, 2006 LONDON (Reuters) - Fewer children in sub-Saharan Africa are dying from measles, diarrhea and respiratory infections but improvements have been offset by HIV/AIDS and malaria, researchers said on Friday.

Countries have made progress in improving infant and maternal health and tackling infectious but a new report on the global burden of disease shows HIV/AIDS is claiming more young lives.

"Worldwide, HIV/AIDS and malaria are large growing causes of death and disease burden, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, where they have negated gains in reducing child mortality from measles, acute respiratory infections, and diarrhea," said Professor Alan Lopez of the University of Queensland in Australia.

Lopez and his team analyzed impact of 136 diseases on the global population in 2001. A similar study had been done 11 years earlier. Their research is published in The Lancet medical journal.

Heart disease and stroke were the leading causes of the 56 million deaths that occurred in 2001. Together they accounted for more than fifth of all deaths worldwide. Another third were due to nutritional deficiencies, infant, maternal and communicable illnesses.

"Among these diseases, HIV/AIDS accounted for only 2 percent of deaths in 1990, but for 14 percent in 2001," said Lopez.

Nearly 20 percent of those who died in 2001 were children under five years old, with 99 percent occurring in poor countries and 40 percent in sub-Saharan Africa.

"More than half of child deaths in 2001 were from five preventable conditions: acute respiratory infection, measles, diarrhea, malaria and HIV/AIDS," Lopez added.

The researchers said deaths in adults dropped in all regions of the world except Europe and Central Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

Heart disease and stroke and injuries were the main cause of the rise in Europe and Central Asia while HIV/AIDS was a major factor in Africa.

"The striking reversal in adult mortality decline in Eastern Europe during the 1990s is a stark reminder that...improvements can be reversed in the absence of sustained health monitoring and policies," said Lopez.

Other leading causes of deaths were COPD (chronic obstructive pulmonary disease), diarrhea, tuberculosis, respiratory infections and road traffic accidents in poor and middle income countries.

In rich nations Alzheimer's, diabetes, and colorectal, breast and stomach cancers were among the biggest killers.