

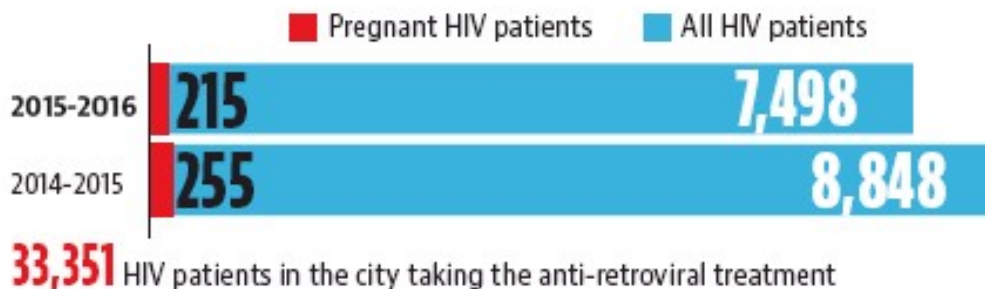
1 Dec 2016 | Mumbai | Aayushi Pratap aayushi.pratap@hindustantimes.com

India's HIV testing not up to mark: Docs

Of the two tests WHO said HIV patients must undergo, only one is used at NACO centres across the country

MUMBAI: In 2013, the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) testing guidelines released by the World Health Organisation (WHO) said that patients undergoing Anti-retroviral treatment (ART) must undergo two important tests- viral load and CD4 count test. While the viral load test counts the numbers of HIV virus particles in the blood, the CD4 cell count test counts the numbers of T cells which provide immunity against infections.

NEW HIV INFECTIONS DIAGNOSED IN MUMBAI



Members of the Mumbai Aids Forum- a group of NGO's in the city that work for causes of HIV patients said they are unhappy with the HIV and AIDS prevention bill which was approved by the cabinet on October 5 2016.

TWO NEW VOICE-MESSAGING APPS FOR PATIENTS

On the occasion of World AIDS Day, Mumbai AIDS Control Society (MDACS) is to launch two voice messaging applications, I Check and Maitra as an interactive tool for HIV patients.

The applications are part of the Information Education & Communication (IEC) services of MDACS. The voice messenger app will send voice notifications to all patients registered with MDACS under first, second and third line ART therapies, about their schedule for center visits.



SURVEY TO INVESTIGATE DRUG RESISTANCE

Officials from National AIDS Control Organisation confirmed that they are to launch a survey to check the multi-drug resistance in patients, undergoing treatment for HIV infection.

The survey will check the resistance and impact of 15 ART drugs, across 40 ART centers across the nation.

The HIV and AIDS prevention bill states that the central and state govt shall provide ART to patients 'as far as possible'. This clause dilutes the govt's obligation to provide free treatment to patients

Eldred Tellis, a member of the forum

In India, the treatment of patients undergoing first line ART at National Aids Control Organisation (NACO) supported centres continues to be monitored, only on the basis of the CD4 test count. Doctors said that the CD4 test by itself is an unreliable indicator of measuring the success or failure of ART.

"When the treatment fails, the virus load in the body increases and the CD4 count decreases gradually and not immediately," said a doctor who works with the WHO. "If we rely just on the CD4 count results, it may be misleading and would lead to believe that the treatment is working fine, when in fact it is not," he added.

Dr Srikala Acharya, additional project director of Maharashtra District Aids Control Society- a body that implements the National Aids Control Programme, said that at present only patients who are on second and third line ART treatment, are tested for viral load.

"We are just following the NACO guidelines. We do viral load testing for patients on first line only if we clinically see their condition deteriorate," she said.

According to a NACO official who did not wish to be named, the organisation has already received a grant from the Global Fund to increase the number of viral load machines across India.

At present, there are only ten viral load machines at NACO supported ART centers across India.

"We should have mandatory viral load test for first line ART patients in the next three months. We had submitted the proposal to Global Fund last year, which was approved," he said.

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