Eight Countries Could Soon Run Out of HIV Meds Due to U.S. Funding Cuts, Says WHO

Plus, if the U.S. ends global program PREPFAR, nearly 7 million extra HIV cases and 6.3 million AIDS-related deaths are predicted by 2029.

March 21, 2025 By Trent Straube

As the U.S. government's funding of global HIV programs remains in disarray, the impact of the financial cuts on AIDS efforts is coming into focus. Earlier this week, the World Health Organization (WHO) said eight nations could run out of their supplies of HIV medications in the upcoming months.

Those countries are Haiti and Ukraine plus six African nations: Kenya, Lesotho, South Sudan, Burkina Faso, Mali and Nigeria, Reuters reports.

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The med shortage is the result of the Trump administration's termination, then partial restoration or temporary pause of support for HIV programs and services operated via organizations such as the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS (PEPFAR) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID).

"Disruptions to HIV programs could undo 20 years of progress, leading to more than 10 million additional cases of HIV and 3 million HIV-related deaths—more than triple the number of deaths last year," said WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, PhD, at a press conference on Monday, March 17. (The WHO operates within the United Nations and coordinates global health efforts.)

"The suspension of most funding to PEPFAR…caused an immediate stop to services for HIV treatment, testing and prevention in more than 50 countries," Tedros said, adding, "Eight countries now have substantial disruptions to antiretroviral therapy, and some will run out of medicines in the coming months."

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) has also been tracking the unfolding impact of U.S. funding cuts on global efforts to end AIDS, offering overviews and country-by-country breakdowns.

UNAIDS estimates that if PEPFAR were halted, "there would be an estimated additional 6.3 million AIDS-related deaths, 3.4 million AIDS orphans, 350,000 new HIV infections among children and an additional 8.7 million adult new infections by 2029—making ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030 impossible."

In its most recent weekly update on the situation, UNAIDS noted an often overlooked population likely to be affected if HIV testing and prevention services remain canceled:

"If women attending antenatal care are no longer tested for HIV, those who are living with HIV will not receive the medicines they need to prevent transmission of HIV to their children. Projections calculated with UNAIDS epidemiological estimates show that an additional 350,000 children will be newly infected with HIV over the coming four years if HIV testing is not available at antenatal care centers.

"HIV prevention services have also been deeply affected by the US funding shifts, including PrEP [pre-exposure prophylaxis] and voluntary medical male circumcision (VMMC). Programs for the procurement, distribution and social marketing of condoms have been impacted in many countries, with UNAIDS staff in Armenia, Ecuador, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Namibia, Rwanda, South Sudan and Uganda reporting specific challenges over the past week."

During his press conference, Tedros highlighted other global health concerns arising as a result of Trump's funding cuts, including efforts to track, contain and tackle diseases such as polio, malaria, measles and tuberculosis as well as efforts to supply essential health care needs.

As of March 4, according to Reuters, 167 health facilities have shut down, and over 220 more are expected to close by June.

Compounding the dire situation, under Trump's direction the United State plans to exit the WHO and cut its funding. What's more, the future of PEPFAR, launched in 2003 by Republican President George W. Bush, is uncertain. Until recently, it enjoyed bipartisan support and has been continuously reauthorized every five years by Congress. This spring, it is once again up for reauthorization and thus on the proverbial chopping block. For background, see "Death, Chaos, Budget Cuts, Exemptions: Updates on Global HIV Program PEPFAR" and "Assessing and Protesting the Toll of Trump's Freeze on USAID and PEPFAR Funds" and click #PEPFAR.

"The U.S. administration has been extremely generous over many years and, of course, is within its rights to decide what it supports and to what extent," Tedros said on Monday. "But the U.S. also has a responsibility to ensure that if it withdraws direct funding for countries, it is done in an orderly and humane way that allows them to find alternative sources of funding.

"We ask the U.S. to reconsider its support for global health, which not only saves lives around the world, it also makes the U.S. safer, by preventing outbreaks from spreading internationally.

"And because health is wealth, fighting disease around the world supports global economic growth and stability, which benefits the U.S."

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