

Slowly, HIV is being beaten

On the principle that no news is good news, the fact that AIDS has dropped out of the **headlines** is surely a good thing. Nevertheless, it does no harm for the world to be reminded from time to time that the illness has not gone away. To that end, UNAIDS and the World Health Organisation promote December 1st as World AIDS Day.

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This year is the last before the target date for the success of the latest of the agencies' campaigns to roll out the antiretroviral drugs. This particular campaign is called 90-90-90. Its aims are that, by 2020, 90% of all those around the world who are infected will know they are infected; 90% of that group will be receiving sustained antiretroviral therapy; and 90% of those receiving therapy will have had the virus effectively suppressed.

As the chart shows, doing this by 2020 is unlikely. Whether that is seen as a failure, though, depends on your point of view. Had the target been reached easily it would surely have been criticised as unambitious.

Regardless of when 90-90-90 is achieved the next aim, 95-95-95, is already pencilled in for 2030. The exact meaning of that phrase is unclear. But in principle eliminating HIV is possible with existing technology. The slogans for this are "zero new HIV infections", "zero AIDS-related deaths" and "zero discrimination".

However, there is no vaccine against HIV. If this state of affairs continues, eliminating the virus will mean giving drugs to all those infected until they have died of other causes. It will also mean someone paying for those drugs. **Exterminating** HIV, then, will be a huge undertaking and an expensive one. But not, with luck, an impossible one.

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