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Government to Conduct First Study of HIV Among Gays, Prostitutes

By The Moscow Times

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The Federal Consumer Protection Agency will conduct the first nationwide study on the spread of HIV among homosexual males and prostitutes next year.

The initiative is the work of the Federal Scientific Center for the Prevention and the Fight Against AIDS, which works under the Consumer Protection Agency, Izvestia reported Friday.

Vadim Pokrovsky, who heads the center, said that research on the spread of HIV in the gay community is difficult because the group is not legally defined. He said that researchers would have to work with the LGBT community to collect representative study samples.

Sex industry workers are also a problematic group to study, as even detained prostitutes have the right refuse a medical examination.

Previously, all attempts to study HIV among so-called "risk groups" were conducted mainly

by NGOs.

Pokrovsky estimated that the study will cost several million rubles and said it will be conducted through polling and testing in different regions.

The budget for AIDS prevention this year was cut in half, from 400 million ($12 million) to 200 million rubles ($6 million), apparently for ideological reasons.

Currently, there are about 600,000 people infected with HIV in Russia, up 70,000 from last year.

This year Russia surpassed the United States in terms of registered HIV cases, despite having less than one half of the U.S. population.

A recent study of prostitutes in St. Petersburg found that 13 percent had HIV.

One in 20 men in their thirties is HIV-infected in Russia, Pokrovsky said, adding that such prevalence calls for large-scale prevention measures.

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