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Minister Says HIV Situation 'Critical' in 10 Russian Regions

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AP/Michel Euler

The spread of HIV has become "critical" in 10 Russian regions, Russia's Health Minister Veronika Skvortsova said Thursday. The Sverdlovsk region recently made headlines when it was revealed that 1.8 percent of the capital Yekaterinburg's population is living with HIV, the highest rate in the country, Skvortsova was quoted as saying by the Interfax news agency.

HIV is spreading fastest in regions which are on drug trafficking routes, according to the minister.

"In 57 percent of cases, the source of infection is injection drugs," Skvortsova said.

She added that a growing number of HIV patients are heterosexual married couples. Forty percent of cases in which people became infected through sexual contact involved heterosexual couples, she said.

"We're not only talking about homosexuals ... We're talking about wives contracting [HIV]

from their husbands, and the number [of HIV patients] is growing among well-to-do women," Skvortsova said.

The number of new cases of HIV has been growing by 10 percent every year since 2006, according to official statistics. The number of HIV-positive patients registered in Russia reached one million in January, according to Vadim Pokrovsky, head of the Moscow-based Federal Center for Fighting AIDS.

However, experts estimate that the number of HIV-positive people in Russia is closer to 1.5 million, since the entire population has not been tested, Pokrovsky noted.

It is expected that a total of 93,000 new HIV cases will have been registered in 2016, which is a historically high level.

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