

# Drug Use No Longer Main Cause of HIV in Russia – Expert

March 15, 2017



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Drug use is no longer the main cause of growing HIV rates in Russia, according to a leading expert.

Alexander Semyonov, head of the immunology and virology lab at the St. Petersburg Pasteur Institute, told the TASS news agency on Wednesday that the disease was increasingly being spread via sexual contact.

"Several years ago the average HIV patient was a drug user consuming two or three doses of heroin every day," Semyonov told reporters. "These days it's entrepreneurs, workers, housewives, students — ordinary people."

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According to the data provided by the Pasteur Institute, 52.8 percent of HIV cases in the first six

months of 2016 involved drug use, compared to 44.6 percent of cases involving heterosexual contact. Only 1.5 percent of cases involved homosexual contact, while 1.1 percent of cases saw the virus transmitted from mother to baby during pregnancy, birth or breastfeeding.

Some 854,187 Russians were registered as living with HIV as of September 2016. The overall number of HIV cases registered since 1985 has exceeded 1 million, or as high as 1.4 million including diagnosed cases, according to Vadim Pokrovsky, head of the Moscow-based Federal Center for Fighting AIDS.

Russia's growing HIV rate differs from much of the developed world, where the number of new cases is falling. In 2015, Russian health authorities registered 95,475 new HIV cases, and another 75,962 during the first nine months of 2016.

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