History of HIV and AIDS

The history of the HIV epidemic is a relatively short one. In the early years, HIV was unknown, feared, untreatable and often fatal. However, over the past 30 years we have come a long way in our understanding of it, where it came from, how it evolved, and most importantly, how to treat and prevent it.

Governments and civil society have increasingly committed to the response with more money channelled towards understanding HIV, and into developing different treatments.

Here we look at the origins of HIV and AIDS, and the key historical moments of the epidemic.

Next full review: 14 February 2020

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History of HIV and AIDS overview

Origin of HIV & AIDS

HIV timeline

The history of HIV and AIDS spans almost 100 years, from its origin in the 1920s, to the global epidemic today. Where did HIV come from? Here we discuss evidence about the origin of HIV and how it came to affect humans. Our interactive timeline lets you explore different events in the history of HIV and read, see and hear how things have changed.