

# Local Governments' Policies and Measures

## Strengthen HIV/AIDS Testing System in Okinawa Prefecture

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### Abstract

Because the number of HIV/AIDS patients is increasing remarkably, Okinawa prefecture has been designated as an emphatic prefecture about HIV/AIDS by MLHW since 2006. We already knew about this problem so public health centers took some measures that included the enlightenment about HIV and strengthen the laboratory system. As the result of these implementations, we achieved the highest rate of having a HIV-titer examination. We suppose some factors contribute increasing examination such as belows, (1) people can take exam through whole week at public health center, (2) rapid examination system was introduced since 2005, (3) people living in Okinawa may have an interest about HIV/AIDS.

**Keywords:** designated as an emphatic prefecture, strengthen HIV testing system in Health Centers, rapid examination system, needs assessment of examinee, people with AIDS when examined

### Change in the numbers of reported cases and tests

Ever since 2006, Okinawa prefecture has been designated as one of the prefectures wherein AIDS prevention policies have to be intensively implemented. This is so because in Okinawa, the number of reported cases of HIV and AIDS remained relatively high at 0.806 per 100,000 people from 2002 to 2004, against the national average of 0.799 per 100,000 people. Well before it was designated as a prefecture wherein AIDS prevention policies have to be intensively implemented, there has been awareness about the large number of HIV-positives and AIDS patients in Okinawa (see Fig. 1). The number of reported cases began to increase in around 1999, and since 2003, there have been more than 10 reported cases a year, prompting 6 public health centers in the prefecture to work on AIDS enlightenment activities. As a result of such activities, the number of HIV antibody test recipients at public health centers has been constantly increasing since 2003, reaching 2,547 in 2006. Okinawa ranked first in the country in terms of the ratio of test recipients to the total population, with 0.186% of the population having taken antibody tests, surpassing the ratio of test recipients in Tokyo (0.185%) and Osaka (0.159%) (see Fig. 2). This document describes the current status of and issues related to efforts in Okinawa to increase the number of HIV antibody test recipients.

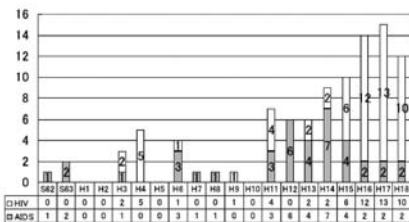


Fig. 1: Number of Reported HIV/AIDS Cases (Okinawa)

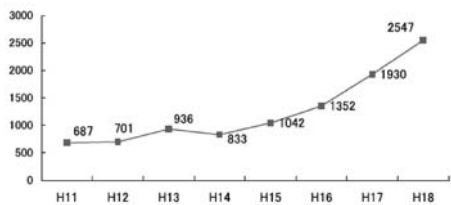


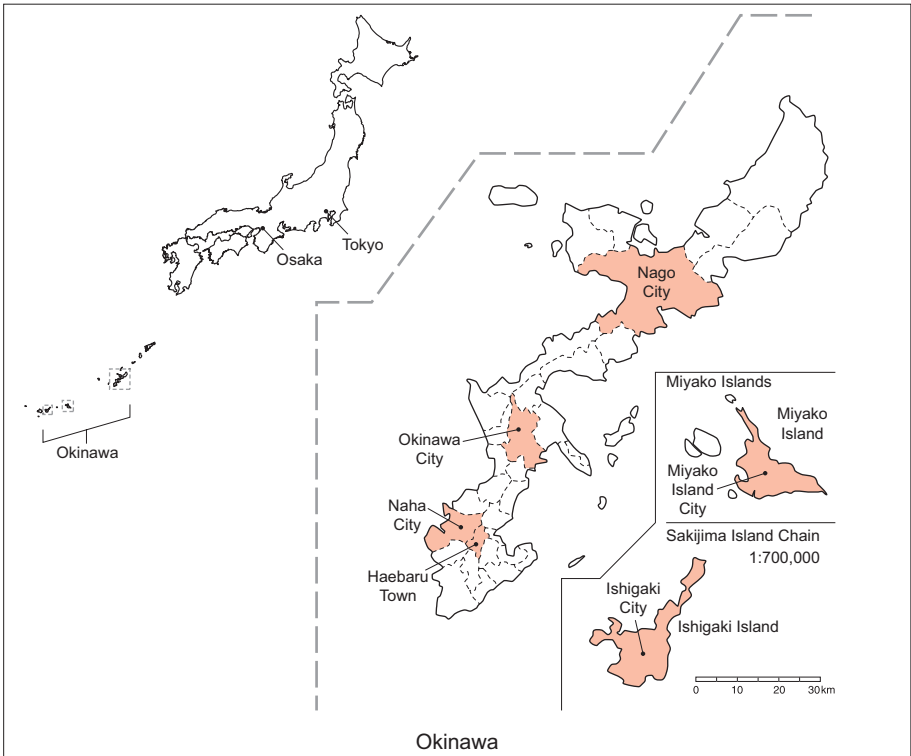
Fig. 2: Change in the Number of People Who Underwent HIV Antibody Testing at Public Health Centers (Okinawa)

### Counseling and testing at public health centers

Since 1993, free and anonymous AIDS testing has been available at public health centers. As of June 2007, the testing service is available on almost all weekdays at all the 6 public health centers, with rapid tests being performed more than once a week at each public health center. The nighttime testing service has been available once a month since fiscal 2007 at 2 public health centers. The schedule for rapid testing has been created such that as far as possible, the days on which the service is available do not overlap at adjacent public health centers (see Fig. 3).

Please call the public health center before you come in for testing.		Mon			Tue			Wed			Thu			Fri			Business hour
		Morning	Day	Night	Morning	Day	Night	Morning	Day	Night	Morning	Day	Night	Morning	Day	Night	
Hokubu Public Health and Welfare Center 0980-52-5219	Regular	○	○		○	○		○	○					○	○	Regular) 9:00~11:30/13:00~16:00 Rapid) 9:00~11:30/13:00~15:00	
	Rapid										○	○					
Chubu Public Health and Welfare Center 098-938-9701	Regular	○	○		○	○		○	○		○	○		○	○	Regular) 9:00~11:00/13:00~15:00 Rapid) 9:00~10:15/13:00~15:00 * Only third Wednesday at night 17:30~20:00	
	Rapid				○	○		○	○	*							
Central Public Health Center 098-854-1005	Regular		○												○	Regular) /13:00 ~ 15:00 Rapid) 9:00~11:30/13:00~15:00 * Only first Wednesday at night 17:30~20:00	
	Rapid	○						○	○	*				○			
Nunbu Public Health and Welfare Center 098-889-6591	Regular	○	○		○					○				○	○	Regular) 9:00~11:00/13:00~16:00 Rapid) 9:00~11:00/13:00~16:00	
	Rapid				○			○	○	○							
Miyako Public Health and Welfare Center 0980-72-2420	Regular																
	Rapid	○	○		○	○		○	○	○			○	○		Rapid) 9:00~11:00/13:00~15:00	
Yaeyama Public Health and Welfare Center 0980-82-2340	Regular	○	○				○	○						○	○	Regular) 9:00~11:00/13:00~15:00 Rapid) 9:00~11:00/13:00~15:00	
	Rapid				○	○				○	○						

Fig. 3: AIDS Testing Calendar in Okinawa



Cities/Towns in Red in the above Map Have HIV Testing Services at Public Health Centers

A pair of a clerical staff with a specialization in infectious diseases and a health outreach worker provides AIDS counseling and testing at each public health center. In principle, the test results are revealed to the concerned individuals by doctors through face-to-face meetings. This is possible because all the 6 public health centers in Okinawa have multiple doctors.

### Effect of the introduction of rapid testing

Rapid testing has been performed once a week (every day at Miyako Public Health and Welfare Center) at all the 6 public health centers since fiscal 2005. At Chubu, Central, and Nanbu Public Health Centers, the number of days on which rapid testing is available has increased to 2 days a week since fiscal 2006, when the general health checkup system was abolished. In rapid testing, the test result is available within about 2 hours after the test, making it more convenient for test recipients. The effect of the availability of this test has been reflected in the rise in the number of people who took the test. In 2005, the total number of antibody tests administered at the 6 public health centers increased 1.4 fold from the previous year to 1,930 cases, out of which the number of rapid tests accounted for 888 cases or about 46% of the total cases. In 2006, the total number of people who took antibody tests reached 2,547, out of which the number of rapid test recipients accounted for 1,653 (or 65%) of the total cases. Thus, the number of rapid test recipients accounted for a majority of antibody test recipients, contributing greatly to increasing the total number of antibody test recipients.

### Activities to increase test recipients in Okinawa

Every year, Okinawa prefecture sponsors enlightenment events in association with World AIDS Day. Usually, musicians are invited to participate in public relations activities aimed at the youth, and these activities are held through tie-ups with local FM stations. Each public health center reports the current AIDS situation to the concerned people (such as those in medical, educational, and administrative institutions, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, etc.) at meetings of the Regional AIDS Control Committee of its respective area, seeking cooperation for enlightenment activities. Such campaigns aimed at the entire public in Okinawa deliver messages to urge people to increase awareness about the fact that the HIV/AIDS problem is not “other people’s problem,” to encourage their partners to take antibody tests, to use condoms to prevent the spread of the AIDS infection, etc. These activities may be almost the same as those sponsored by other local governments across the country. In Okinawa, however, partly because the number of people potentially infected with the virus is supposed to be high, the reported number of HIV-positives increases as the number of test recipients increases, raising public awareness about AIDS, which, in turn, further increases the number of antibody test recipients.

### Needs assessment of test recipients

Surveys on test recipients are performed occasionally at some public health centers. Some of the results are as follows. The largest number of test recipients were in their 20s, followed by those in their 30s. The number of male test recipients was somewhat larger than that of female recipients. Most people obtained information about the antibody tests through the Internet or through friends. Local people (those living within the jurisdiction area of each public health center) accounted for 58%, while those who took a day off for the tests on weekdays accounted for 56% of all the test recipients. Many respondents cited the availability of rapid testing as their motive to take the tests. In surveys on men who have sex with men (MSM), many cited concerns with regard to privacy protection and dates on which testing was available as factors that they found inconvenient at public health centers. Through such surveys on test recipients and by taking into consideration the factors pertaining to the convenience of testing that are specific to each region, public health centers are working on creating appropriate testing environments.

### Decline in the percentage of “sudden AIDS” cases

The cases where a person is found to have already developed AIDS when he/she is diagnosed as HIV-positive are often called “sudden AIDS.” Before 2003, the percentage of sudden AIDS cases in Okinawa, calculated by the formula “AIDS patients/(HIV-positives

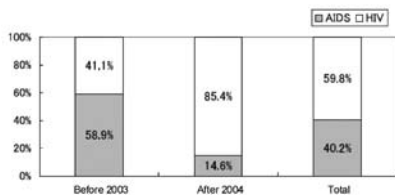


Fig. 4: Change in the Percentage of HIV and AIDS Cases (Okinawa)

+ AIDS patients),” was 58.9%. As the number of antibody test recipients increased, the number of people infected with the virus but who had not yet developed AIDS increased. In the 3 years from 2004 to 2006, the percentage of sudden AIDS cases declined to 14.6% (See Fig. 4). As sudden AIDS raises concerns over not only the symptoms of AIDS patients themselves but also the possibility of their partners getting infected, the decline in the percentage can be construed as one of the positive effects of the increased number of test recipients. Especially in the past 3 years, most of those who turn out to be HIV-positive are MSM in their 20s and 30s, suggesting that the number of test recipients from a group targeted by a separate AIDS policy is also on the rise.

## **Conclusion**

As mentioned above, Okinawa prefecture has been enhancing its antibody test systems mainly at public health centers and, through enlightenment activities targeted at the entire public in the prefecture, the number of test recipients is constantly increasing. This upward trend continued into fiscal 2007. As Okinawa has people who might potentially get infected through unprotected sex, the reported number of HIV-positives will continue to increase as the number of test recipients increases, which, in turn, will further increase the number of people receiving tests at public health centers in Okinawa. This cycle that characterizes an increase in the number of test recipients is expected to continue. Okinawa prefecture is determined to continue with its efforts to reinforce medical systems centering on core AIDS care hospitals in order to further increase the total number of test recipients and successfully reduce the number of sudden AIDS cases.

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