

Public Health: Germany prosecutes over HIV infection

Nadja Benaissa, lead singer with No Angels, once one of Germany's most popular pop groups, is under arrest, accused of causing grievous bodily harm by infecting one or more men with the HIV virus.

The singer, who was arrested in Frankfurt on Saturday, is accused of having unprotected sex with three men despite being HIV positive, and failing to tell them of the risk they face. One of the three has since tested HIV positive.

The charge is the latest in a series of cases around the world: just last week we [reported](#) on the case of a musician in Canada who was convicted of murder by wilfully or recklessly infecting women with HIV/AIDS.

The number of cases has been building for several years: for example, in 2004 a 28 year old Malawian, Feston Konzani, was convicted by [Teesside](#) Crown Court in the north east of England, the Judge making a point of saying the four year sentence was deliberately severe to "send a clear message to those that suffer from your infection and that is that they must disclose it to their sexual partners and they must take protection if sexual intercourse is to occur."

The World Health Organisation has recently released figures saying that 25% of [tuberculosis](#) deaths in 2007 were HIV related - twice as many as previously estimated.

The WHO recently waded into the controversy over the use of condoms: leaders of a number of religions have made statements against the use of condoms. But last month, the WHO issued an updated "position statement" which provided some sympathy with the views of those religious leaders - but made it clear that condoms are an essential part of the armoury against the spread of the infection. The WHO said "Condoms are a key component of combination prevention strategies individuals can choose at different times in their lives to reduce their risks of sexual exposure to HIV. These include delay of sexual initiation, abstinence, being safer by being faithful to one's partner when both partners are uninfected and consistently faithful, reducing the number of sexual partners, correct and consistent use of condoms and male circumcision. Conclusive evidence from extensive research among heterosexual couples in which one partner is infected with HIV shows that correct and consistent condom use significantly reduces the risk of HIV transmission from both men to women, and also from women to men. Laboratory studies show that male latex condoms are impermeable to infectious agents contained in genital secretions."

It also says "condoms must be readily available universally, either free or at low cost, and promoted in ways that help overcome social and personal obstacles to their use."

Governments around the world are now seeing HIV infection rates rise - amid fears that sex is both a tension reliever and free hobby during economic tough times. There is therefore an expectation that unplanned pregnancies and STDs, including HIV / AIDS, will see a significant increase when figures for the past two years - and the near future - are released.

As a result, healthcare costs are expected to rise dramatically, particularly as retroviral drugs are some of the world's most expensive.

This creates an imperative to take all available measures to reduce the infection rate - and prosecutions are, therefore, likely to increase.