

NEWS



Doctors in Pakistan call for workers deported from the UAE to be screened for HIV

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Doctors and health agencies in Pakistan have called on the government to introduce screening for HIV for people being deported from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to protect others from infection.

Pakistani authorities have reported concerns over the spread of the virus by people who are deported from the UAE after testing positive for HIV and who keep their status secret because of social taboos.

“As there are no screening facilities at airports to test the deportees and inform their families accordingly they transmit the disease to others,” said Shamsheer Khan, a doctor who works at the anti-retroviral therapy centre in Peshawar. “We want facilities at airports to screen all deportees,” he said.

WHO has urged the Pakistan government to screen deported nationals at the airport and inform their families if they test positive. It also wants the UAE to inform host countries about deportees’ health status.

In a statement in November WHO said that up to 70% of the partners of people with HIV were also HIV positive, but that many of those partners were not currently being tested.

About 4 million Pakistanis work in the UAE as tailors, drivers, masons, teachers, labourers, and road sweepers.

There are 1741 people who have been diagnosed with HIV in Pakistan. However, WHO has estimated that the true number is closer to 100 000.

Shaukat Ali, secretary of the Pakistan based AIDS Patients Association, told *The BMJ* that Pakistan was struggling to deal with the number of people deported from the UAE after testing positive for HIV.

“Half of the total AIDS patients in Pakistan are deportees who are spreading the disease to their partners,” said Ali. “There must be facilities at the airports to screen all deportees for HIV and other diseases to save others from being infected.”

Ahmed Ali of Pakistan’s AIDS Control Programme, said: “During the past year, we have seen around 20 new HIV cases, all of whom had been deported from the UAE.”

Ali said that the programme had launched a new strategy to address the stigma associated with HIV and AIDS.