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India home to 21L HIV+, 3rd highest in world

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Representative image. (Thinkstock photos/Getty Images)

NEW DELHI: India has 21.17 lakh people living with HIV, the third largest in the world after South Africa (68 lakh) and Nigeria (34 lakh), health minister J P Nadda informed Lok Sabha on Friday. Though the incidence of new cases has declined significantly, the government is currently faced with a challenge of sustaining the rate of reduction.

To facilitate this, the government has decided to revamp its National AIDS Control Programme and extend free anti-retroviral therapy (ART) to those with a CD4 cell count of less than 500, earlier this was at 300. CD4 is a type of white blood cell that fights infection.

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This number is nearly the average pop of an Indian district. That means one full district of India is made up of HIV patients.

Ankit Singh

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"The total number of patients with CD4 count of less than 350 is estimated to be at 13,45,678. Out of this, the number of people on ART is 9.25 lakh making a coverage rate of 69%," Nadda said. ART is a therapy that improves the life quality of HIV patients with treatment that maximally suppresses the HIV virus.

At present, Nadda said there are 524 ART centres and 1,094 link centres in the country providing free anti-retroviral therapy, treatment for opportunistic infections and counselling services to 9.25 lakh people living with HIV. Based on HIV prevalence in different parts of the country, he said ART centres are scaled up every year.