

HIV Cases Rising in Khulna Region, 23 Deaths in One Year

Md Hasanur Rahman Tanzir – The number of HIV-positive or AIDS patients is increasing every year in the Khulna region. Deaths are also rising. Over the past year, both detection and mortality indicators have shown an upward trend. Physicians warn that if awareness does not improve immediately, the situation may spiral out of control.

Officials at the Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) Centre of Khulna Medical College Hospital (Khulna Medical) said that 10 to 15 people come for HIV testing every day. Those who test positive receive regular counselling and free medication.

The ART centre began operations in September 2017 with 158 HIV-positive patients. Apart from the 10 districts of the Khulna division, patients from surrounding districts—including Gopalganj, Madaripur, Faridpur, Pirojpur and Jhalakathi—also receive treatment here.

Investigations reveal that several NGOs are also working with HIV-positive patients in the Khulna region.

According to data from the ART centre, between November 2024 and October 2025, blood samples of 1,279 people were tested, and 100 new HIV-positive cases were detected. Among them were 8 children. During the same period, 23 people died—17 men and 6 women. Those who died included 7 from Jashore, 4 from Khulna, 4 from Narail, 4 from Satkhira, 2 from Bagerhat, and 1 each from Patuakhali and Pirojpur.

In 2024, samples from 1,547 people were tested, detecting 85 cases and 20 deaths. This means both infection and death rates have increased compared to the previous year.

Among the newly detected patients, 56 were from the general

population, 37 were men who have sex with men (MSM), and 7 were infected through blood. District-wise, Khulna accounted for 49 cases, Bagerhat 16, Narail 11, Satkhira 11, Jashore 6, Gopalganj 3, Pirojpur 2, while Kushtia and Rajbari each had 1 case. By gender, 35 were men and 14 were women.

According to the Khulna General Hospital Blood Bank, 9 people tested positive for HIV from September 2024 to October 2025, 8 of them men. Many said unsafe sexual activity was the source of infection.

Dr. Rafiqul Islam Gazi, Superintendent of Khulna General Hospital, said most infected individuals are between 25 and 40 years old. "Unsafe sexual relations are the main cause. Screening-free blood transfusion also spreads the infection," he added.

According to the National AIDS/STD Control Programme, HIV detection nationwide has more than doubled in the last five years. In 2020, 658 cases were detected, which rose to 1,438 in 2024. Most infected are in the 25–49 age group.

Experts say the risk is increasing rapidly due to the reuse of needles among drug users, risky sexual behaviour, migrants bringing the virus from abroad, and insufficient testing. Currently, around 8,245 patients are receiving treatment at 14 centres nationwide.

Physicians at Khulna Medical College Hospital say that although HIV is not fully curable, it can now be managed with treatment. Recently, infections have increased due to unprotected sexual activity.

Dr. Iqbal Hossain, focal person of the ART centre, said HIV risk is higher in Khulna because it is a border-adjacent region. "Many people entering through sea and land ports do not undergo blood screening. Irregular testing among sex workers and reluctance to use protection during sexual intercourse are worsening the situation," he said.

He added that unsafe sexual contact—whether heterosexual or homosexual—remains the biggest cause of infection. The virus can also spread from mother to child during pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding. Using condoms during every sexual encounter, avoiding multiple partners, screening blood before transfusion or organ transplant, and avoiding used needles are essential preventive measures.

He further noted that communication among homosexual individuals via online-based apps is increasing, raising the risk of infection. Many infected patients suffer severe mental stress, and some even consider suicide. They receive regular counselling at the centre.

ART centre counsellor and administrator Dibesh Ojha said there are currently 887 registered patients—542 men, 338 women, and 17 transgender individuals. About 550 take medication regularly, while the rest have either died or moved to other centres.

Data shows that in the Khulna region, 36 people were HIV-positive in 2020 (7 deaths), 28 in 2021 (5 deaths), 65 in 2022 (8 deaths), 65 in 2023 (19 deaths), and 85 in 2024 (20 deaths).

During a recent visit to the centre, four people—including a teenager and a transgender person—arrived for testing, and all were found HIV-negative.

One HIV-positive patient, speaking anonymously, said, “When I first learned I had the disease, I felt everything was over. After coming for counselling at Khulna Medical, I realized that regular medication can keep the virus under control.”

Counsellor Dibesh Ojha added that several patients disclosed being engaged in male-to-male sexual activity. Physicians rely on interviews to identify this behaviour as there is no separate test for it.

Khulna Civil Surgeon Dr. Mahfuza Khatun said, "Increasing detection will make control easier. People must become more aware. Treatment is free at Khulna Medical, but due to social stigma, many avoid seeking care."