



The epidemic has three main phases, that of **infection** which is largely unseen and undetected without an HIV testing programme. This is followed by the **sickness** phase, on average 8 - 10 years after infection in the developed nations and about 2 - 3 years in the developing nations. At this stage the epidemic becomes visible with people becoming ill from opportunistic infections. Very shortly after this phase comes the dying or **terminal** stage with massive increases in the normal death rate. This usually follows very rapidly after the sickness phase has set in, though antiretroviral therapy is able to extend the sickness phase by about 5 years. It usually after a nation or region has entered the sickness and terminal stages that action is put in place to help those who are infected and to commence prevention programmes.