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South Africa Says AIDS Caused at Least 8.7% of Deaths in 2001

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Johannesburg - South Africa's government said AIDS caused at least 8.7 percent of all deaths in 2001, almost double the rate of four years earlier.

An increase in tuberculosis and pneumonia deaths implied some doctors may be underreporting AIDS, Statistics South Africa said. The study was based on death certificates filed by doctors.

The percentage of deaths from AIDS rose from 4.6 percent in 1997, and totaled 7.4 percent in the five years through 2001. The United Nations AIDS program estimates spending needs to triple to about \$10 billion a year to combat the spread of AIDS around the world.

"HIV has become a major underlying cause of death in South Africa," Statistics South Africa in a report.

As many as one in nine South Africans are infected with HIV, the virus that causes AIDS, according to government estimates