

UC San Diego

UC San Diego News Center

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## New Video Series Chronicles AIDS Epidemic in Tijuana

**“HIV/SIDA: The Epidemic in Tijuana” focuses on UC San Diego researchers’ efforts to track and prevent the spread of HIV among the city’s most at-risk populations**



The new documentary *“HIV/SIDA: The Epidemic in Tijuana”* offers an unflinching look at the challenges facing researchers from the University of California, San Diego as they attempt to identify and treat people who inject drugs, sex workers, transgender women and others who are at high risk for HIV infection in Tijuana. The program, which was shot over two years, premieres Oct. 5 at 8 p.m. on UCSD-TV and can be viewed at [www.uctv.tv/hiv-sida](http://www.uctv.tv/hiv-sida).

The documentary is split into four episodes, each telling a piece of the HIV/AIDS story in Tijuana. The series starts in El Bordo, a neighborhood of injecting drug users in the Tijuana River Canal, and then moves to Prevecasa where UC San Diego and Mexican medical

students offer free care at the Health Frontiers in Tijuana clinic. From there, it turns its focus to a tattoo removal clinic and then a telemedicine program that connects patients with remotely located HIV doctors. The series continues with poignant stories and photos of people living with HIV and concludes with a wrap of what it would take to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Tijuana.

“*HIV/SIDA*” is organized around the research of UC San Diego epidemiologist Steffanie Strathdee, who is the chief of UC San Diego’s division of Global Public Health, UCSD psychologist Tom Patterson and their binational team of doctors, nurses and healthcare outreach workers. Their research has shown that Tijuana’s prevalence of HIV is three times higher than in Mexico at large. Strathdee said the documentary is a call to action to address the epidemic in a strategic and coordinated manner.

“It’s possible to end AIDS in Tijuana, but we need to take a broader look. Mexico as a whole should see Tijuana as a window for what could be the HIV epidemic for the rest of the country,” she said. “I also believe it shouldn’t just be Mexico’s responsibility to stop this epidemic because we have a shared population across the border. We need a binational response.”

The binational nature of Tijuana’s epidemic is reflected in the series title as *SIDA* is the Spanish term for AIDS, the acronym for *síndrome de inmunodeficiencia adquirida*.

“*HIV/SIDA*” was made possible through a grant from the Ford Foundation. UCTV Producer Shannon Bradley based the video series on “*Tomorrow Is a Long Time*,” a photo essay book with vignettes by photographer Malcolm Linton and Jon Cohen, two long-time collaborators who have travelled to more than 30 countries to document the HIV/AIDS epidemic for *Science* magazine.

Cohen said there is already a recipe for how to end the AIDS epidemic, which includes:

- Identifying where high-risk groups congregate and then saturating those locales with rapid HIV testing and distributing educational materials as well as condoms, clean needles and syringes.
- Testing all pregnant women.
- Offering circumcision to men.
- Connecting those who test positive with counselors who can emphasize the importance of treatment and not infecting others.
- Providing antiretrovirals to all those infected with HIV and having case workers oversee their treatment so they achieve undetectable viral loads, which makes transmission to others less

likely.

- Offer antiretrovirals as preventatives to high-risk groups as a way to reduce transmission.

“We all know the recipe for ending AIDS,” Cohen said, “but it’s not happening aggressively enough in Tijuana. Could we do this? Could we break the back of the epidemic and get to the point where one person isn’t infecting another? Absolutely. The tools exist.”

UCSD-TV airs on channel 135 on Cox, channel 1231 on Time Warner, and channel 99 on AT&T U-Verse.

UCSD-TV is part of UCTV, the systemwide network of the University of California, and is a division of UC San Diego Extension.

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