

Pill could help eradicate HIV in gay men

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The elimination of HIV infections in gay men is on the horizon after the first fall in diagnoses for three decades.

NHS chiefs are now under pressure to routinely offer a pill that cuts the risk of infection by 90 per cent. Many men are already buying it online and this has contributed to a 32 per cent fall in transmission between gay men in five London clinics in a year, research in the journal *Eurosurveillance* indicated. New cases across England fell by 17 per cent. Transmission between heterosexuals did not change.

Valerie Delpech, head of HIV surveillance at Public Health England, said that this was the first year since the early 1980s in which new cases among gay men had not risen. "We are in a brilliant situation where we could see for the first time a significant downturn, if not elimination," she said.

About 6,000 people are diagnosed each year in Britain, about half of them gay men. Drugs can now cut the risk of passing on the virus by 96 per cent — more than a condom. An antiviral combination known as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) has been shown to prevent infection and hundreds of men started buying it online in 2015.

NHS England fought an unsuccessful court battle to try to avoid paying for the treatment before agreeing a compromise whereby 10,000 will get access in a clinical trial later this year.