medicines and treatment to HIV/AIDS patients all over the world.

The guidelines which are due to be unveiled on World AIDS Day on 1 December will be followed by a massive training programme to instruct thousands of nurses and other medical workers in the new procedure.

Both guidelines and training are part of a new WHO drive to address the failure to deliver ARVs to the millions of people who need them in the developing world. WHO declared this a global public health emergency on 22 September at the UN General Assembly High-Level Meeting on HIV/AIDS in New York.

“ARV [antiretroviral] treatment is still very tailored to individual patients which means that a huge number of ARV combinations are possible,” said Gottfried Hirnschall from WHO’s HIV/AIDS department, adding that this makes drug procurement and training unnecessarily complicated, time-consuming and more costly.

The idea of a single standardized ARV procedure was inspired by WHO’s recent success with DOTS, a standardized treatment strategy for people with tuberculosis. Standardization is one of a number of new initiatives launched in October to tackle the worsening global epidemic.

The Global Fund to fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria said that of the US$ 623 million in funds it has raised and approved for new grants, about 60 per cent would be channelled into HIV/AIDS programmes. Other agencies have joined WHO in their challenge to help governments, nongovernmental organizations and health professionals to develop National Prevention of Blindness Plans. The kit, launched on World Sight Day on 10 October 2003, contains the latest information, documents, web sites and slide shows offering practical guidance on how to prevent blindness.

WHO estimates that globally between 40 to 45 million people are blind and 135 million have low vision. This despite the fact that 80 per cent of visual loss can be prevented or cured, according to WHO and IAPB. “The latest research shows that the numbers of people who needlessly become blind are increasing. WHO is committed to reversing that trend,” said WHO Director-General, Dr LEE Jong-wook.

The majority of blindness — an estimated 90 per cent — occurs in developing countries where it takes a heavy economic toll at all levels of society through lost productivity. “The cost of education, rehabilitation and lost productivity due to blindness has a significant impact on individuals, families, communities and nations — particularly in the poorest areas of the world. WHO will support countries in developing the right to sight,” said LEE. The leading causes of avoidable blindness and visual impairment are catarach, trachoma, river blindness and conditions in children such as vitamin A deficiency and retinopathy of pre-maturity. Their impact is accentuated by the lack of glasses and low vision aids.

VISION 2020: The Right to Sight is a joint initiative of WHO and IAPB working in partnership with other UN agencies, governments, eye care organizations, health professionals, institutions and individuals. Launched in 1999, it aims to eliminate avoidable blindness by the year 2020. Governments have already indicated their commitment to the initiative by the unanimous adoption of a resolution on Elimination of Avoidable Blindness at the 56th World Health Assembly in May of this year. It urges governments to develop, evaluate and implement National Prevention of Blindness Plans by 2007.

WHO launches blindness prevention “Tool Kit”

The World Health Organization and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) has launched a CD Rom Tool Kit intended to help governments, nongovernmental organizations and health professionals to develop National Prevention of Blindness Plans. The kit, launched on World Sight Day on 10 October 2003, contains the latest information, documents, web sites and slide shows offering practical guidance on how to prevent blindness.

Global burden of musculoskeletal disease revealed in new WHO report

“The Burden of Musculoskeletal Conditions at the Start of the New Millennium,” a WHO report released on 27 October, aims to better prepare