

Helping Women Avoid HIV/AIDS Infection and Transmission

USAID Global Health



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With women of childbearing age accounting for more than half the people living with HIV/AIDS, USAID has long put women at the center of its HIV/AIDS programming. An integral piece of the programming is the prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT). HIV infection in women can lead to the transmission of the virus to their children during pregnancy, at the time of delivery, or through breastfeeding. In partnership with the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), USAID implements a multifaceted PMTCT approach in virtually every geographic region of the world.

In an effort to reduce mother-to-child HIV transmission, USAID works to ensure that programs have a comprehensive strategy that includes:

- Primary prevention of new infections in women of childbearing age
- Prevention of unintended pregnancies among women living with HIV
- Prevention of HIV transmission from mothers living with HIV to their infants
- Care, treatment, and support for mothers living with HIV, their children, and their families

One of the critical first steps is to provide HIV counseling and testing to pregnant women in order to identify those who are living with HIV, and provide them with the resources to prevent transmission to their infants, and to provide ongoing prevention efforts to those who are uninfected. For mothers who test positive, USAID works with host-country governments to support access to either prophylaxis or initiation of treatment as medically eligible, as well as safe infant feeding practices, early infant diagnosis, and ongoing follow-up care for mothers and exposed infants. USAID also works to integrate family planning and HIV activities because the prevention of unintended pregnancies in HIV-infected women is a key strategy in preventing transmission to infants.

These programs – coupled with other programs to prevent HIV infection in women, to provide care, treatment, and support for women living with HIV and their families, and to integrate routine maternal, newborn, and child health services – could dramatically reduce mother-to-child transmission and improve the health and survival of those infants who do become infected. In 2009, PEPFAR directly supported programs that allowed nearly 100,000 babies of HIV-positive mothers to be born HIV free, adding to the nearly 240,000 babies born without HIV due to PEPFAR support.

Today, the effort to put women at the center of the Agency's HIV/AIDS programming is more important than ever. With women of childbearing age representing more than half of all people living with HIV/AIDS, prevention and treatment are crucial and remain key priorities for the Agency.

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Web site

http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/global_health/aids/index.html

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