

## ELIMINATING PERINATAL HIV TRANSMISSION

### WHAT IS THE PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE?

Perinatal HIV transmission occurs when the virus is passed from mother to child during pregnancy, labor or delivery, or through breast-feeding. Perinatal transmission accounts for 91% of all AIDS cases reported among U.S. children, and an estimated 17,000 HIV infections have occurred among children since the epidemic began. Women of color and their children have been disproportionately affected. Of the 3,748 children reported with perinatally-acquired AIDS in 2002, 3,200 (85%) were African American and Latino/Hispanic.

### WHAT HAS CDC ACCOMPLISHED?

There have been dramatic reductions in perinatal HIV transmission rates and perinatal AIDS cases in the United States in the past decade. During the early 1990s, an estimated 1,000 to 2,000 infants were born with HIV infection each year. In 2002, an estimated 90 cases of perinatally acquired AIDS cases were diagnosed in the United States. These declines reflect the success of widespread implementation of the Public Health Service recommendations for routine counseling and voluntary HIV testing of pregnant women, the use of zidovudine (AZT, also called ZDV) by HIV-positive women during pregnancy and delivery; for treatment of the infant after birth; and the use of antiretroviral therapies for the pregnant woman's own care. Recently, some of the decline in perinatal AIDS may also be credited to improved treatments, which delay the onset of AIDS symptoms in HIV-positive children.

Decreasing perinatal HIV transmission is one of four key strategies included in CDC's new initiative, "Advancing HIV Prevention: New Strategies for a Changing Epidemic," announced in the *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report* on April 17, 2003. CDC plans to work with partners to promote routine, voluntary prenatal testing, with right of refusal; develop guidance for using rapid tests during labor and delivery or post partum; provide training in conducting prenatal testing; and monitor integration of routine prenatal testing into medical practice. CDC recommends that clinicians routinely screen all pregnant women for HIV infection, using an "opt-out" approach, and that jurisdictions with statutory barriers to such routine prenatal screening consider revising them. CDC is focusing its prevention efforts in the states and cities that account for the highest number of perinatal HIV cases. Activities include educating providers about offering counseling and voluntary testing to all pregnant women, outreach to increase the use of prenatal care among high-risk women; case management for HIV-positive pregnant women to ensure they have access to appropriate care; support for public information campaigns; and support of testing at delivery for women with unknown HIV status.

### *Example of Program in Action*

CDC is funding targeted perinatal prevention programs in 16 high HIV prevalence states (CA, CT, DE, DC, FL, GA, IL, LA, MD, MA, NJ, NY, PA, PR, SC, and TX). Several of these states (LA, NJ, and CT) have developed programs to offer rapid testing around the time of labor and delivery to women whose HIV status is unknown when they are in labor. These projects demonstrate the feasibility of carrying out rapid HIV testing in busy inner city hospitals and offering rapid antiretroviral interventions to prevent perinatal transmission.

### WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

The best way to prevent perinatal HIV transmission is to first prevent HIV infection in women. CDC is working through these targeted perinatal prevention programs to ensure that all HIV-positive and at-risk pregnant women have access to and use prenatal care. Further, CDC is working to ensure that these women are provided the opportunity to learn their HIV status early in their pregnancy and, if infected, to be offered anti-retroviral interventions to prevent transmission and protect their own health. Achieving this goal will require CDC to continue to work towards linking high-risk women with appropriate healthcare and to offer universal HIV screening as a routine part of prenatal care.

*For additional information on this or other CDC programs, visit [www.cdc.gov/program](http://www.cdc.gov/program)*

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