

Unitaid, unicef and who announce massive scale-up in fight against hiv in mothers and children

Medicine

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GENEVA/MEXICO CITY/NEW YORK, 31 July 2008 — As the world's leaders and AIDS community gather in Mexico for the biennial global conference on HIV and AIDS, UNITAID, UNICEF and the World Health Organization (WHO) today announced an infusion of \$50 million aimed at halting mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

Over the next two years, UNITAID funding will be used to test some 10 million pregnant women for HIV and treat 285 000 mothers and children in nine target countries: Central African Republic, China, Haiti, Lesotho, Myanmar, Nigeria, Swaziland, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. These countries represent approximately 25% of the world's HIV-infected pregnant women giving birth annually.

"This effort aims to go beyond mere prevention by promoting ongoing treatment for mothers and their babies," said Dr Philippe Douste-Blazy, Chair of UNITAID's Executive Board. "Our aim is to fund the most effective and appropriate medicines and diagnostics on the market for both women and children."

A novel element of the project is that it will allow UNICEF to negotiate reduced drug prices, allowing for a greater scale-up of more effective treatment for HIV-infected women as well as aim to prevent infection in their children. This ramping up means the WHO-recommended treatment protocol – introduced in 2006 and a far superior solution to the single therapy Nevirapine – can be implemented much more quickly and intensively.

Funding will also provide a one-year course of antiretroviral treatment to HIV positive pregnant women in need, in the nine countries.

"Testing pregnant women for HIV gives mothers a better chance to survive this disease," said Ann M. Veneman, UNICEF Executive Director. "Women, their children and their entire communities benefit when life-saving treatment is provided to HIV positive mothers as quickly as possible."

WHO will ensure that expansion of programmes, use of antiretroviral medicines and procurement of commodities are done according to published guidelines and recommendations through close collaboration with Ministries of Health. WHO will also provide support in monitoring and evaluating prevention-of-mother-to-child transmission programmes to meet national targets.

"Women are one of the main target groups for WHO action," said Dr Margaret Chan, WHO Director-General. "Women play an important role in the functioning of communities, in caring for and educating children and make invaluable contributions to societies' development."

The three agencies are already funding and providing commodities to prevent mother to child HIV transmission in eight African countries, representing approximately 342 000 women.

About UNITAID

UNITAID is an international financing facility committed to the scale-up of treatment and care for HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis. It was founded in 2006 by Brazil, Chile, France, Norway and the United Kingdom. Currently, UNITAID is supported by 27 countries - 19 of which are developing or transition countries - and the Gates Foundation. In less than two years of operation, UNITAID has disbursed US\$ 280 million and committed US\$ 200 more for the purchase of health commodities for the poorest countries.

About UNICEF

UNICEF is on the ground in over 150 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from

violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.

About WHO

WHO is the directing and coordinating authority for health within the United Nations system. It is responsible for providing leadership on global health matters, shaping the health research agenda, setting norms and standards, articulating evidence-based policy options, providing technical support to countries and monitoring and assessing health trends.