

## Making Strides Against HIV/AIDS

Good news may seem in short supply when it comes to the global HIV/AIDS epidemic. More than a quarter-century after AIDS was first recognized, the disease continues to prey upon children, stealing their lives, diminishing their futures, shattering their families and communities, and leaving them exposed to abuse and exploitation. In 2007, estimates indicated that 2.1 million children were living with HIV and 420,000 had become newly infected.

Against this bleak backdrop, however, there are some truly heartening developments. According to two new reports jointly released by UNICEF, UNAIDS, and other UN partners, recent major progress in the fight against HIV/AIDS means that more children and mothers are getting treatment and many more lives are being saved.



*Testing and treating at-risk newborns for HIV can be critical to their survival.*

### AMONG THE HIGHLIGHTS:

- The number of people receiving antiretroviral therapy in low- and middle-income countries has increased ten-fold, from 400,000 in 2003 to more than 4 million last year.
- The proportion of HIV-positive pregnant women receiving anti-retroviral drugs in those countries has grown from 10 percent in 2004 to about 45 percent in 2008.
- The number of children under 15 benefiting from these life-prolonging drugs was more than 275,000 in 2008, a 39 percent increase over 2007.

In 2005, UNICEF, UNAIDS, and other partners launched the “Unite for Children, Unite against AIDS” campaign, gaining the support of national governments, communities, and non-governmental organizations and making children a top priority in

prevention and treatment. Five years later, these efforts are clearly paying off.

In Lesotho, an impoverished nation in southern Africa with the world’s third-highest HIV prevalence rate, UNICEF has supported the country’s rapid expansion of a program that prevents transmission of the virus from mothers to their unborn babies. Since 2004, the number of health facilities providing this lifesaving service, as well as early infant HIV diagnosis, has ballooned from 9 to 181. Among an estimated 14,000 HIV-positive pregnant women, more than 8,500 were enrolled in prevention of mother-to-child transmission services in 2008.

Behind these statistics are young mothers like Malehloa. Pregnant with her second child when she discovered she was HIV-positive, Malehloa followed her treatment regimen rigorously and gave birth to a healthy baby, free of HIV. She then joined

a UNICEF-supported group called Mothers2Mothers, which trains HIV-positive mothers to help other women living with the virus and teach them how to protect their babies from infection. “I am helping mothers to be like me and to have babies like mine,” says Malehloa.

Despite recent advances, though, monumental shortfalls remain. One particularly glaring example is the lack of early infant diagnosis. Newborns tested and treated for HIV within the first few months of life have a significantly better chance of survival than those who are not tested. Yet only 15 percent of children born to HIV-positive mothers are being tested in the critical first two months of life.

UNICEF will not rest until the day when a generation of children is born free of HIV.

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