Study Hints That Micronutrient Supplement Might Help HIV-Positive Kids

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A daily supplement including key vitamins and minerals showed a bit of promise for increasing survival in Ugandan children living with HIV, according to a study presented at the Fifth International AIDS Society (IAS) Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention in Cape Town.

Survival among HIV-positive children in the developing world is still far poorer than that of similar children in more developed nations. This is partly due to the lack of antiretroviral treatment options in many such nations, but also due to poor nutrition among children in those countries.

To determine the efficacy and safety of a micronutrient supplement in HIV-positive children, Grace Ndeezi, a PhD student at Makerere University's Department of Pediatrics and Child Health in Kampala, Uganda, and her colleagues compared six months of treatment with a vitamin and mineral supplement to a placebo. In all, 847 children between 1 and 5 years old participated in the six-month study. After the first six months, Ndeezi's team followed the children for an additional 12 months. Of the participating children, 84 percent completed the first six months of the study and 76 percent completed the 12-month follow-up. All of the children were also taking antiretroviral therapy.

Overall, 53 children (6.3 percent) died. Most died within the first six months of the study. At the completion of the first six months, it appeared that children who got a placebo had a 50 percent greater chance of death than those who received the micronutrient supplement. This difference, however, was still small enough to have occurred by chance—and disappeared by the time Ndeezi and her colleagues had followed them for an additional 12 months.

The authors conclude that micronutrient supplements are safe and might increase survival, but that studies longer than six months will be needed to reach this conclusion.

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