Improvements Needed in Addressing Global Pediatric HIV

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The global stakeholders need to improve their tactics in both diagnosing and treating HIV among children, according to an editorial published in PLOS Medicine. Despite ambitious efforts to prevent global mother-to-child (MTC) HIV transmission, 210,000 new pediatric HIV cases in 2012 were added to the existing 3.4 million children living with the virus. Figures on AIDS deaths among children for that year are not yet available, but 230,000 children died of the disease in 2011.

In 2011, the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS (UNAIDS) identified 21 priority countries for which they set a goal of reducing new pediatric infections and cutting in half maternal deaths from HIV/AIDS by 2015.

The PLOS article critiques the global strategies to combat MTC HIV transmission as focusing too narrowly on transmission in utero or during birth and failing to re-test for possible transmissions through breast milk up until children are 2 years old.

The 2 million children currently receiving antiretrovirals (ARVs) to treat HIV represents an improvement, according to the article. However, in the 21 priority nations, just 24 percent of children eligible to receive ARVs actually do, compared with 65 percent of eligible adults. Without treatment, half of those infected with HIV will die before their second birthday, but only a third of this age group currently receives treatment.

To read the PLOS Medicine article, click here.

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