Using Drones to Deliver HIV Test Results

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UNICEF Malawi is testing a new program that uses drones to deliver the HIV test results of infants, reports Forbes.

Currently, results are delivered by motorbike or ambulance. But because of the poor condition of roads, irregular delivery schedules and the high cost of fuel, it can take as long as eight weeks to deliver results from a lab to the health care facility where the mother and infant are located.

To speed up the delivery time, the Malawi government, UNICEF Malawi and the U.S. company Matternet are testing a drone delivery system. The first flights have already been completed over a 10-kilometer route (about 6 miles) using drones created by Matternet.

The HIV prevalence rate in Malawi is about 10 percent, one of the highest in the world. Each year, about 10,000 children die of HIV-related illness in the country, and in 2014, nearly 40,000 babies were born to HIV-positive mothers.

“Quality care of these children depends on early diagnosis, which requires taking dried blood samples from the health center to the central laboratory for testing,” said Mahimbo Mdoe, a UNICEF representative in Malawi, in a press release. “We hope that these drones can be part of the solution to reduce transportation time and ensure that children who need it start their treatment early.”

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