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There is a possibility of cure for HIV patients: Dr. Hemamalini Vadlamani

Every step towards reducing the mortality and morbidity of People Living with HIV (PLHIV) is a step towards PPTCT.

Shahid Akhter • ETHealthWorld • December 21, 2021, 06:31 IST



Shahid Akhter, editor, ETHealthworld, spoke to **Dr. Hemamalini Vadlamani**, General Physician, Fernandez Hospital, to know more about the challenges associated with

vertical transmission of HIV.

Can you brief us about some important achievements that have been made in the prevention of mother-to-child HIV transmission?

There are many important achievements in the field of [Prevention](#)

of **Parent to Child Transmission** (PPTCT) since HIV was first detected in 1980s. Every step towards reducing the mortality and morbidity of **People Living with HIV** (PLHIV) is a step towards PPTCT. Implementation of mandatory prenatal screening for **HIV infection** is one such step taken by the government which is crucial in preventing vertical transmission. Mothers can make an informed decision about their pregnancy. The screening also helps in the early detection of the virus, and its subsequent treatment. In case the mother is HIV positive, there are **antiretroviral** (ART) drugs available that are safe and effective and are initiated during pregnancy to make sure the infant is not infected.

Over the years ART has become more accessible, safer and robust with all government ART centres following NACO guidelines diligently. The **National AIDS Control Programme** (NACP) rolled out WHO option B (triple ART for all mothers to continue with even after delivery, for the mother's health and future PPTCT) in 2014 in India as soon as the WHO put it forward. It has been found that mother to child transmission of HIV is the primary route of transmission for HIV among children. Without any intervention, the risk is estimated to be anywhere around 20-45%. Therefore, there is free testing available now at all ART centres, Early Infant HIV Diagnosis (EID) facilities and lifelong ART for all pregnant and breastfeeding women living with HIV. This is aligned with the Government of India's commitment to work towards the global target of "elimination of new HIV infections among children."

Which factors are important in the vertical transmission of HIV?

Mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) of HIV-1 can occur before, during, and after delivery. Transmission is rare during early pregnancy and relatively frequent in late pregnancy and during delivery.

Risk factors for vertical transmission include

- Maternal progression of infection, measured as the peripheral blood viral load
- Low CD4 count
- Noncompliance with medication
- Lapse in HIV screening in the first trimester
- Social stigmas and doctors' attitudes towards HIV positive mothers which impedes them to avail PPTCT services
- Failure to follow precautions during vaginal delivery of HIV positive mothers
- Transmission through breastfeeding if the mother is not on ART or is non-compliant

- Lack of frequent check-ups of babies born to HIV positive mothers.

Earlier this month, there was news about a woman in Argentina becoming second known person in the world whose immune system had apparently “cured” her HIV. What do these rare, isolated examples of potential HIV cures say about our understanding of the virus ?

Definitely these rare reports show a ray of hope to HIV patients that there is a possibility for a cure soon, when HIV will no longer be a life-threatening disease and will be curable like TB, leprosy etc. Also, it increases chances for an HIV prevention vaccine in the future, which will make way for an HIV free world like it was achieved for smallpox, polio etc.

What are the ways to help women overcome actual or perceived HIV-related stigma and discrimination and other barriers that influence their decision-making about HIV prevention, testing and use of PMTCT services?

There are many myths surrounding HIV among the general population as well as medical personnel despite numerous programmes aimed at expelling these myths. The fear of contracting the disease from an HIV infected person just by going near them is very prevalent, though it is not openly expressed or discussed. People living with HIV (PLHIV) face a lot of discrimination and have to deal with the social stigma. Generally, society has a hostile attitude towards them..

There needs to be a change in this attitude and this change can be driven by the government, NGOs, private hospitals and influencers through social media, education and rigorous training programmes. Steps like incorporating information about HIV in school and college syllabus; sensitizing medical personnel with important information that any patient can be at potential risk (due to false negatives during screening) and can infect the handling surgeon if universal precautions are not followed properly, can be good initiators. Also, providing special care to HIV positive mothers in terms of maintaining confidentiality, counselling services, and early diagnosis can help women in overcoming major barriers.

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People Living with HIV National AIDS Control Programme interviews

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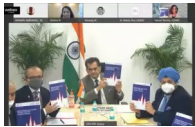
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Covid can be said to have become endemic only after 4 weeks of consistently low cases: Virologist Dr T Jacob John

He also said the endemic phase of COVID-19 is expected to last many months and it is "most unlikely" that another variant with higher transmissibility than Omicron and greater virulence than Delta will emerge.

PTI

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S.Korea vows efforts to support vaccination in Asia's developing nations

South Korea reaffirmed its commitment to comprehensive vaccine support for Asia's developing countries during a virtual session hosted by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, according to Seoul's foreign ministry Tuesday.

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Non-Covid operations back to old-normal routine across private hospitals in

Kolkata

Most hospitals say this is the closest they have been to the pre-March, 2020, scenario when Covid wards didn't exist.

Prithvijit Mitra • TNN

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Taiwan says needs to re-open, eyes March cut to COVID quarantine

Health Minister Chen Shih-chung, who leads the command centre in charge of fighting the pandemic, told reporters they were aiming to cut quarantine to 10 days before the middle of March, confident they can detect any infections within that period with testing

Reuters

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BMC study: Omicron behind 21 of 23 deaths, 15 were unvaxxed

This is among the first genomic confirmation of the Omicron variant among fatalities.

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US farms on alert as several cases of bird flu

found

After having already detected the virus in wild birds on several occasions on the east coast in recent weeks, the department said on February 9 it had found the disease in birds on a farm in Indiana.

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India's COVID-19 positivity rate dips to 0.99 per cent

India recorded 27,409 fresh COVID-19 infections and 347 deaths in the last 24 hours, 82,817 patients recovered from the infection the past day, taking the cumulative tally of recovered patients to 4,17,60,458

ETHealthWorld

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India reports 26k new Covid cases, the lowest this year

The third wave continued to abate rapidly in the country, with daily cases on Monday dropping to the lowest recorded this year and deaths staying below 300 for the second day running.

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Advanced surgical technologies enhance

clinical outcomes in childhood cancers

Close to the heels of World Cancer Day – 4th Feb is a special day for children with cancer that is observed internationally on 15th February.

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SC sets aside HC order which allowed re-inspection of Annasaheb Chudaman Patil Memorial Medical College to increase seats

The Supreme Court on Monday set aside two orders of the Aurangabad bench of Bombay High Court which allowed re-inspection of Annasaheb Chudaman Patil Memorial Medical College after the National Medical Commission cancelled college plea to increase intake of medical students.

ANI

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