

UNICEF - Prevention of Mother-to-child transmission is essential for a HIV Free Generation

Friday 30 November 2012

JUBA, 1 December 2012 – The commemoration of World Aids Day is marked today by a series of events organized by South Sudan Aids Commission (SSAC) and partners in all ten states of South Sudan.

As the day is celebrated all over the country, South Sudan still has a long way to go in preventing new infections especially in children. Despite the three percent HIV prevalence rate in the country, very few mothers get tested for HIV during their pregnancy and even fewer women access antenatal care hence increasing the chances of infecting their newborns.

Treating HIV-positive pregnant women not only keeps them alive and well, but prevents babies from acquiring HIV during pregnancy, delivery and the breastfeeding period. Treatment can also prevent sexual transmission from an HIV-positive woman to an HIV-negative partner.

“In order to achieve an AIDs free generation, the focus needs to be on prevention of mother to child transmission and this can only be achieved if mothers-to-be know their status and start early treatment,” said UNICEF’s Officer in-charge, Elizabeth Quaye.

Globally, there has been a 24 per cent reduction in the number of new HIV infections in children from-430,000 in 2009 to 330,000 in 2011. And, as of December 2011, over 100,000 more children were receiving antiretroviral treatment compared to 2010.

This however represents less than one-third of children and pregnant women who are receiving the treatment they need as opposed to the global average of 54 per cent for adults overall. The case is not different in South Sudan as a large percentage of pregnant women who test positive do not seek treatment for themselves or their children.

All hope is not lost for South Sudan as there has been a slight improvement in the number of children and pregnant women receiving treatment, however more awareness is required for mothers to know their status so as to seek early treatment and to protect their unborn babies.

An HIV free generation can only be achieved through protecting the youngest and most vulnerable through early detection and treatment.

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