

International Community Must Do More To Treat HIV-Positive Children

Oxfam, Plan International, Save the Children, UNICEF, World Vision and others come together to Rally for Child-Focused Treatment, Research and Investment

New York/London, 26 May 2006 –Only one child in twenty who needs HIV treatment receives it, according to a report launched today by seven of the world's leading child advocacy organizations. The Global Movement for Children (GMC) issued an urgent appeal for the international community to recognize that children with HIV and AIDS have a right to treatment that must be addressed to save their lives and beat the epidemic.

"The lack of treatment amounts to a death sentence for millions of children," said Dean Hirsch, chairman of the Global Movement for Children and president of World Vision International. "Without treatment, most children with HIV will die before their fifth birthday. These children are missing out on treatment because they are missing from the global AIDS agenda."

Saving Lives: Children's right to HIV and AIDS treatment, the GMC's report, reveals that despite an urgent need for paediatric treatment, alarmingly few drugs are available in formulations that are affordable and able to be administered to children while the development of new drugs continues to focus mainly on adults.

"Children are the missing face of HIV and AIDS. Millions have watched their worlds shatter around them because of this disease, losing parents, teachers, a sense of security and hope for the future. Children affected by HIV and AIDS are often discriminated against and face enormous odds," said Ann M. Veneman, Executive Director of UNICEF. "Through strengthened partnerships among governments, donors, international agencies and the private sector, we must do everything possible to ensure that drugs, diagnostic equipment and resources are available to treat children."

Although the majority of people living with HIV are adults, HIV-positive children represent a disproportionate number of those needing immediate treatment. More than 90 per cent of children with HIV live in sub-Saharan Africa. These children also have the least access to any treatment. But in the current profit-driven climate of drug development, they offer little financial incentive to the pharmaceutical industry, the report states. As a result, despite an urgent need for paediatric formulations of anti retroviral therapy (ART) in developing countries, child appropriate treatment is practically non-existent.

As of June 2005, an estimated four million children were in need of cotrimoxazole, a readily available antibiotic costing only \$.03 per day per child. Cotrimoxazole prevents life-threatening infections in HIV infected children and infants born to HIV-positive mothers whose status might be unknown. It can also delay the onset of AIDS and the need for anti-retroviral therapy.

The GMC report calls for specific steps, including:

- Develop and make available simple and affordable diagnostic tests.
- Increase research and development for child specific treatment.
- Improve health care systems of developing countries to improve drug delivery systems.

- Establish child-specific treatment targets.

While ensuring that all HIV-positive children have access to treatment will save lives, prevention of infection is crucial. According to the report, 90 per cent of HIV-positive children are infected by a failure to prevent mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) in the first place.

“We know how to dramatically reduce transmission of HIV from mother to child at a modest cost, ” said Charles MacCormack, president and CEO of Save the Children USA. “But more global resources are needed to expand these programs to make them more available and accessible to women in need.”

The report cites evidence showing that providing a mother with a full range of MTCT services can reduce the risk of transmission to less than two per cent. Currently, less than ten per cent of HIV-positive pregnant women receive drug therapies to prevent transmission of the virus to their infants.

Significant progress has been made in treating HIV and AIDS since the virus was first identified 25 years ago, but along the way children have been overlooked. Children affected by HIV and AIDS have a right to equal access to treatment and care; without any significant increases in funding these rights will not be met.

Speaking from London, Thomas Miller, Chief Executive Officer of Plan International said, “Unless the world takes urgent account of the specific impact AIDS has on children we will fail to meet Millennium Development Goal (MGD) 6 - to halt and begin to reverse the spread of the disease by 2015. ”

Paediatric AIDS treatment is one of the key components of ‘Unite for Children, Unite Against AIDS,’ a global partnership to limit the impact of HIV on children and help halt the spread of the disease.

The Global Movement for Children is a worldwide movement of organizations uniting efforts to build a world fit for children. It was commissioned by the following organizations: ENDA Tiers Monde, the Latin America and Caribbean Network for Children (Redlamyc), Oxfam, Plan, Save the Children, UNICEF and World Vision.