

PRESS STATEMENT

UNAIDS calls for urgent analysis and more research on hormonal contraceptives and HIV infection risk

GENEVA, 4 October 2011— The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) is following with concern data from recent studies suggesting that women using hormonal contraceptives are at increased risk of acquiring HIV infection from their partners and transmitting HIV to them. The benefits of quality hormonal contraception have been repeatedly demonstrated and must be considered while evaluating the potential for increased risk of HIV infection.

All women should have access to safe family planning methods to meet their sexual and reproductive health needs. Access to safe contraception is also vital to reducing maternal and infant mortality and contributes to decreasing new HIV infections in children.

There have been a number of studies on the impact that hormonal contraceptives may have on the risk of HIV infection. Some have shown increased risk while others have shown no significant increase in risk of HIV infection. The studies must be further analyzed to guide policy decisions and to determine the programmatic implications.

The World Health Organization will bring together experts and researchers in January 2012 to discuss the findings in preparation to update global guidance on HIV and contraception use. UNAIDS is working closely with partners to provide the best possible guidance to countries on safe contraception and HIV prevention options.

Young women have increased risk of unwanted pregnancies and HIV infection across the world. This is particularly true of countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Reaching young women with HIV services is a high priority, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa where women are more likely to become infected with HIV than men.

The most recent HIV prevalence data from 2009 shows that in sub-Saharan Africa, 13 women become infected for every 10 men infected. One half of people living with HIV globally are women and 76% of all HIV-positive women live in sub-Saharan Africa. For example, recent research in rural Vulindlela, South Africa shows that from 2005–2008, HIV prevalence in young women ages 19-20 was 33%, ages 21-22 it was 44% and ages 23-24 it was 51%.

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UNAIDS, the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS, is an innovative United Nations partnership that leads and inspires the world in achieving universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support. Learn more at unaids.org.