

## PRESS STATEMENT

### **UNAIDS welcomes further evidence that starting antiretroviral therapy early saves lives**

**GENEVA, 27 May 2015**—UNAIDS welcomes additional evidence that starting antiretroviral therapy at a higher CD4 (a measure of immune system health) level has a positive effect on the health and well-being of people living with HIV.

“Every person living with HIV should have immediate access to life-saving antiretroviral therapy,” said Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS. “Delaying access to HIV treatment under any pretext is denying the right to health.”

The NIH-funded international randomized clinical trial START (Strategic Timing of Antiretroviral Treatment) has found compelling evidence that the benefits of immediately starting antiretroviral therapy outweigh the risks. Data from the study showed that the risk of AIDS, other serious illnesses or death was reduced by 53% among people who started treatment when their CD4 levels were 500 or above, compared to the group whose treatment was deferred to when their CD4 levels dropped to 350.

The START announcement follows a series of research findings over the past several years indicating the health benefits of starting HIV treatment earlier. The findings from these studies will play an important role in shaping the new treatment guidance from the World Health Organization due to be released later in 2015.

“This is a further demonstration of the importance of science and research that enables an evidence-based, people-centred response to HIV that leaves no one behind,” said Michel Sidibé, Executive Director of UNAIDS. “The findings strongly support the UNAIDS Fast-Track approach to achieving the 90-90-90<sup>1</sup> HIV treatment targets and ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030.”

UNAIDS reaffirms the importance of respecting a person’s right to know their HIV status and to decide whether and when to begin antiretroviral therapy. HIV treatment decisions must be well-informed and voluntary. Wider and more equitable delivery of antiretroviral therapy will require increased efforts to address the social and legal barriers that inhibit access to health services for people living with HIV, especially marginalized populations.

Evidence of the health benefits of earlier initiation of treatment, combined with previous findings on the impact of antiretroviral medicines on reducing HIV transmission, confirms that antiretroviral therapy is a cornerstone of efforts to save and improve lives as well as to prevent new HIV infections together with all other HIV prevention options currently available.

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<sup>1</sup> 90% of people living with HIV knowing their HIV status; 90% of people who know their HIV-positive status on treatment; and 90% of people on treatment with suppressed viral loads.

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## **Contact**

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## **UNAIDS**

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) leads and inspires the world to achieve its shared vision of zero new HIV infections, zero discrimination and zero AIDS-related deaths. UNAIDS unites the efforts of 11 UN organizations—UNHCR, UNICEF, WFP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNODC, UN Women, ILO, UNESCO, WHO and the World Bank—and works closely with global and national partners towards ending the AIDS epidemic by 2030. Learn more at [unaids.org](http://unaids.org) and connect with us on Facebook and Twitter.