

PRESS STATEMENT

On World Cancer Day 2016, UNAIDS calls for greater integration of health services to save women's lives

GENEVA, 4 February 2016 —On World Cancer Day, UNAIDS calls for greater investment in the prevention and treatment of cervical cancer and underlines the additional benefits to be achieved for women and adolescent girls from a coordinated response to HIV and cervical cancer.

Every year, more than 500 000 women develop cervical cancer, which is caused by the human papilloma-virus (HPV), and more than 250 000 women die of the disease, most of whom live in low- and middle-income countries. Yet cervical cancer is a preventable disease that can also be successfully treated if detected early. Furthermore, the relationship between HPV and HIV offers significant opportunities to reduce the impact of both viruses, since existing HIV programmes could play an important role in expanding cervical cancer prevention and treatment services. For example, every woman who tests positive for HIV should be offered cervical cancer screening and follow-up treatment if necessary; HIV testing should also be offered during cervical cancer screening.

“Women are dying from cervical cancer unnecessarily,” said UNAIDS Executive Director, Michel Sidibé. “We must take advantage of the synergies that exist in responding to HIV and HPV to provide integrated and expanded quality prevention and treatment services and ensure that all women and adolescent girls have unrestricted access to quality health care, including to sexual and reproductive health-care services.”

UNAIDS is a founding member of Pink Ribbon Red Ribbon, a global partnership dedicated to helping women access preventive care and treatment for cervical and breast cancers where the need is greatest and is also part of the Cervical Cancer Action coalition's five-year initiative to build momentum for action on global cervical cancer prevention.

HPV infection increases women's vulnerability to HIV transmission, while women living with HIV are four to five times more likely to develop cervical cancer than their HIV-negative peers. HPV infections are common in the general population and most people with strong immune systems will be free of them over time. However, women with weakened immune systems are less likely to clear the HPV virus and become more susceptible to developing pre-invasive lesions that can, if left untreated, quickly progress to invasive, life-threatening cancer.

Reducing preventable deaths from cervical cancer requires a comprehensive approach that delivers effective and age-appropriate programmes that include the vaccination of young adolescent girls against HPV, the screening of women at risk of developing cervical cancer, treatment of pre-cancerous cervical lesions and treatment for invasive and advanced cervical cancer, including chemotherapy and/or radiotherapy.

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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 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals. Learn more at unaids.org and connect with us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.