

PRESS STATEMENT

UNAIDS and UNICEF welcome news of a baby born with HIV who now as a toddler appears “functionally cured” through treatment

And looks forward to further studies to see if findings can be replicated.

GENEVA, 4 March 2013—The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) and UNICEF welcome a new case study, which found a baby treated with antiretroviral drugs in the first 30 hours of life and who continued on HIV treatment for 18 months appeared to be functionally cured.

The findings were presented today at the Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI) in Atlanta, Georgia in the United States of America.

According to researchers the mother who was living with HIV at the time of birth had not received antiretroviral (ARV) medication or prenatal care. Researchers say that the child was born prematurely in July 2010 in the state of Mississippi. Due to the high risk of exposure to HIV, the researchers say the baby was started on a triple therapy regimen of antiretroviral drug 30 hours after birth and before proof of infection could be confirmed. The newborn’s HIV-positive status was subsequently confirmed through a highly sensitive polymerase chain reaction testing which was conducted on several occasions.

The case study stated that the baby was discharged from the hospital after one week and continued ARV treatment until 18 months of age, when for reasons that are unclear the treatment was discontinued. However, when the child was seen by medical professionals about a half a year later, blood samples revealed undetectable HIV levels and no HIV-specific antibodies.

If the findings are confirmed this would be the first well-documented case of an HIV-positive child who appears to have no detectable levels of the virus despite stopping HIV treatment.

“This news gives us great hope that a cure for HIV in children is possible and could bring us one step closer to an AIDS free generation,” said UNAIDS Executive Director Michel Sidibé. “This also underscores the need for research and innovation especially in the area of early diagnostics.”

In 2011, UNAIDS and its partners launched a *Global plan for the elimination of new HIV infections among children by 2015 and keeping their mothers alive*. Significant progress has been made and continued support and research is needed.

“While we wait for these results to be confirmed with further research, it is potentially great news,” said UNICEF Executive Director, Anthony Lake. “This case also demonstrates what we already know—it is vital to test newborn babies at risk as soon as possible.”

According to data from the World Health Organization and UNICEF only 28% of HIV-exposed babies were tested for HIV within six weeks of birth in 2010. Obstacles to early diagnosis and treatment include the high cost of diagnostics and difficulty of getting timely results and limited

access to services and medicines. There were 330 000 children newly infected with HIV in 2011. At the end of 2011, 28% of children under the age of 15 living with HIV were on HIV treatment, compared to 54% of eligible adults.

Now two and a half year's old, the toddler continues to thrive without antiretroviral therapy and has no identifiable levels of HIV. However, UNAIDS cautions that more studies need to be conducted to understand the outcomes and whether the current findings can be replicated.

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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 to maximize results for the AIDS response. Learn more at unaids.org and connect with us on Facebook and Twitter.

UNICEF

For 60 years UNICEF has been the world's leader for children, working on the ground in 156 countries and territories to help children survive and thrive, from early childhood through adolescence. The world's largest provider of vaccines for developing countries, UNICEF supports child health and nutrition, good water and sanitation, quality basic education for all boys and girls, and the protection of children from violence, exploitation, and AIDS. UNICEF is funded entirely by the voluntary contributions of individuals, businesses, foundations and governments.