



Questions and Answers (MTCT)

Q. What is MTCT?

A. MTCT stands for Mother-to-Child transmission of HIV. If a pregnant mother is living with HIV/AIDS there is a 30% chance that the infant will be passed the virus. The virus can be passed in different stages: during pregnancy, during birthing, or while breast-feeding. It is estimated that 65% of transmissions occur during or before birthing.

Q. What can be done to prevent this?

A. There are four main prevention methods in order to prevent HIV transmission between mother and child. First, prevention efforts need to target young girls and women so that they do not become carriers of HIV. Second, unwanted pregnancy can be avoided with birth control methods; the condom plays a vital role connecting these two points as it is the only birth control method able to also prevent HIV transmissions. Third, women who are pregnant need to be tested, so that they know their status. Finally, pregnant women who are living with HIV can utilize the methods available to help prevent transmission, however this is not 100% prevention. With proper treatment MTCT can be greatly reduced.

Q. Is there research on this?

A. Yes. One study used the AZT treatment for the mother before birthing and the infant after birthing and reduced transmissions by 60%. Studies in Ivory Coast, Uganda, and Burkina Faso showed reduced transmission rates of between 37% and 47%.

Q. What will happen if I am pregnant and test positive?

A. There are medications available to help reduce the probability of transmission during pregnancy and birthing. Medical staff will also suggest that you breast-feed your infant for the first six-months and then switch to formula feeding to reduce the chances of transmission during breast-feeding. Single-doses of one treatment, nevirapine, have shown to reduce transmission rates by 50%, this offering great hope for poorer people and nations as it is very cheap in relation to other treatments.

Q. Is MTCT a serious issue in HIV transmission?

A. Yes. However, one great hope is that prevention is possible, even in the short term. During 2005 UNAIDS estimates that 700,000 children under 15 were living with HIV/AIDS. The majority of these children contracted HIV through MTCT. Most of these transmissions took place in developing countries.