

Media Statement

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HIV prevented in babies

Western Australia's internationally renowned team of HIV experts have reported a 100 per cent success rate in stopping transmission of the disease between infected mothers and their unborn babies.

Amongst women identified as having HIV (and receiving treatment) there have been no cases in WA of HIV transmission from mother to child in the past 14 years.

From 1999-2005, 56 pregnancies occurred in women identified as carrying HIV in WA and 48 of these pregnancies received medical treatment which resulted in no transmission of HIV from mother to child.

The untreated eight pregnancies resulted in five babies becoming infected with HIV.

Professor Martyn French said that, left untreated, there was a high chance of babies contracting HIV from their HIV positive mothers.

"The chances of a baby contracting HIV from its mother depends on how well the mother and baby are managed," Prof French said.

"We can reduce the virus in the mother's blood through antiretroviral treatment and prevent transmission to the baby."

To prevent transmission to the baby women are treated during pregnancy and intravenously during labour, breast-feeding is avoided to prevent the infection passing to the baby and all babies are given treatment for four weeks after birth.

"It is important for all women with HIV who are considering pregnancy to seek medical advice," Ms Cain said.

“It is also recommended that women with HIV give birth in Perth where treatment is readily available and accessible.”

Much of this success is due to the work of the Rural/Remote Immunology Clinical Service which was established in 1999 as a response to the increasing number of HIV infected patients in country areas and the complexity of procedures and treatments used to manage HIV infected patients.

Of the 56 pregnancies in women identified as having HIV, twenty two were in Indigenous women.

RPH Clinical Immunology Clinical Nurse Allison Cain coordinates the programme which is headed by RPH Head of Clinical Service for the Department of Immunology, Professor Martyn French and assisted by Clinical Immunologist Dr Patty Martinez and Immunodeficiency Physician Dr Ronan Murray.

Ms Cain said the team provided assistance to doctors and nurses in the clinical and social management of HIV infected patients in non-metropolitan regions of WA.

“This also includes conducting clinics in some of the regional areas and providing education to local health care professionals,” Ms Cain said.

“The programme has also includes managing pregnant HIV women. They are intensively treated by a multidisciplinary team of nurses, doctors and social workers. “

The team also includes specialists from King Edward and Princess Margaret Hospital who provide expertise on antenatal and paediatric issues.

In February this year the programme had 218 registered regional patients with HIV.

A paper reporting these results was recently published in the Australian and New Zealand Journal of Obstetrics and Gynaecology.

Media Contacts

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