

Press Release

WABA/ABM Joint Statement on World AIDS Day

30 November 2018



World Alliance for
Breastfeeding Action



Know Your Status : A Matter of HIV-free Survival

Every week, around 7000 young women aged 15-24 years become infected with HIV. In sub-Saharan Africa, three in four new infections are among girls who are twice as likely to be living with HIV than men.

On [World AIDS Day 2018](#), UNAIDS is focusing on HIV testing. Testing for HIV allows you to seek HIV treatment if you are HIV-positive or to protect yourself if you are HIV-negative. Knowing your HIV status gives you the power to take control of your health and well-being.

HIV treatment, care, and support provide the means to scale up prevention of vertical transmission to the next generation, cut new infection rates and save the lives of mothers. HIV testing is usually the entry point for HIV prevention or treatment. Early detection of the HIV status of women will provide an opportunity to start antiretroviral drug treatment.

Due to the high risk of acquiring HIV during pregnancy, all pregnant women not living with HIV should be retested in the third trimester, during labour and/or during the postpartum period. Early treatment enables pregnant women to receive prompt antiretroviral treatment (ART) for themselves and early antiretroviral (ARV) prophylaxis to reduce the risk of transmission of HIV to their babies during pregnancy, birth, and breastfeeding.

The risk of vertical transmission is particularly high if a woman acquires a new HIV infection, leading to high viral levels in her blood or milk while she is pregnant or breastfeeding. It is strongly recommended that all HIV-exposed infants have virological testing at 4-6 weeks or at the earliest opportunity thereafter. Early Infant Diagnosis (EID) of HIV infection is critical to ensure optimal treatment outcomes for children.

With no interventions, ~30-40% of infants born to HIV-positive mothers may be infected during pregnancy, birth, after birth, or during breastfeeding. Maternal/infant ARV regimens during pregnancy and breastfeeding greatly reduce vertical transmission of HIV. Postnatal transmission of HIV (i.e. through breastfeeding) can be further reduced to 0-1% if pregnant women living with HIV have access to effective lifelong ART upon diagnosis.

Infant mortality in the first year is very high in untreated HIV-infected infants. HIV-exposed infants should get early HIV testing with prompt return of results, rapid initiation of treatment and receive continued breastfeeding in order to improve survival. Breastfeeding also protects against other frequent causes of preventable child mortality such as pneumonia, diarrhoeal diseases, and undernutrition.



Even when ARVs are not available, breastfeeding may still provide infants born to HIV-infected mothers with a greater chance of HIV-free survival. Mothers should be counselled to exclusively breastfeed in the first six months of life and continue breastfeeding thereafter unless environmental and social circumstances are safe for and supportive of replacement feeding.



The World Alliance of Breastfeeding Action (WABA) has published the second edition of the HIV Kit - Understanding International Policy on HIV and Breastfeeding. This comprehensive resource seeks to inform about the concepts and recommendations for dealing with infant feeding and HIV-free survival. The Kit was developed in close cooperation with international reviewers, and endorsed by the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine.

[Read the HIV Kit now](#)

World AIDS Day 2018 reminds us to make HIV testing a priority. Early testing/detection of HIV will enable people to make informed decisions about breastfeeding in the context of HIV to ensure HIV-free survival.

References

1. [World AIDS Day: Know Your Status. UNAIDS. 2018](#)
2. [Understanding International Policy on HIV and Breastfeeding: a comprehensive resource. WABA June 2018](#)
3. [Fact sheet - Latest statistics on the status of the AIDS epidemic. UNAIDS July 2018](#)



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The World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action (WABA) is a global network of individuals and organisations concerned with the protection, promotion and support of breastfeeding worldwide based on the Innocenti Declarations, the Ten Links for Nurturing the Future and the WHO/UNICEF Global Strategy for Infant and Young Child Feeding. Its core partners are international Baby Food Action Network (IBFAN), La Leche League International (LLL), International Lactation Consultant Association (ILCA), and Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine (ABM). WABA is in consultative status with UNICEF and an NGO in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC). WABA is incorporated in Malaysia as World Alliance for Breastfeeding Action Bhd (847762-P), a non-profit company limited by guarantee.

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