

Prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV-1 in Africa.

Abstract:

PIP: With the prevalence of HIV among pregnant women higher than 35% in some parts of sub-Saharan Africa, the number of HIV-infected children will continue to grow. It is estimated that almost 70% of the approximately 500,000 children who became infected with HIV in 1995 were born in sub-Saharan Africa. An effective intervention to prevent the vertical transmission of HIV is therefore most urgently needed in Africa. Following the release of the results of the AIDS Clinical Trials Group (ACTG) 076 study, the routine use of zidovudine (AZT) among HIV-infected pregnant women in the US and Europe has resulted in a significant reduction in the rate of mother-to-child vertical HIV transmission. However, most women in Africa will not benefit from these advances in the immediate future due to inadequate prenatal health care, the unavailability of prenatal HIV testing, and the high cost and complexity of the recommended regimen. Researchers need to build upon the findings of developed countries to identify feasible, effective, and implementable interventions to reduce the vertical transmission of HIV as well as to prevent HIV infection among women and to protect the health of HIV-infected women in Africa. Rates and timing of vertical HIV transmission, risk factors associated with vertical HIV transmission, and prevention interventions are discussed.