



Regional Minimum Standards for Harmonised Approaches to the Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV in the SADC Region



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Implementing agreed-upon, regional minimum standards for harmonised approaches to preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV can drastically reduce infection rates among newborns and infants in the SADC region.

The Background

The SADC region leads the world in terms of HIV infections, with the majority of Member States experiencing national adult HIV prevalence levels of more than 10%, while several have adult prevalence higher than 15%. Eleven SADC Member States rank among the 27 countries globally that account for 80% of all children living with HIV. Infection in children is predominantly a result of mother-to-child transmission of the virus, and is an underlying factor in many infant and childhood illnesses and deaths in the SADC region.

The Rationale

There is strong evidence globally and increasingly also in the SADC region, that mother-to-child transmission of HIV can be virtually eliminated. In Botswana, for example, mother-to-child transmission rates have been reduced from 40% to about 3%. Uptake of services to prevent mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) is on the increase in the region, although it is generally below universal access targets. Uptake in Member States ranges between 2% and 91%, which indicates that Member States are at very different levels of programme implementation. The reach, accessibility and impact of PMTCT programmes in the SADC region must be expanded.

The Principles

The proposed regional minimum standards are informed by the World Health Organization's framework for a comprehensive approach to the prevention of HIV infections in infants and young children. The standards are organised in accordance with the four main components of the comprehensive approach framework: preventing HIV infection in women, preventing unintended pregnancies in HIV-infected women, preventing transmission of HIV from women to their infants, and providing care and support for HIV-infected women, their infants and their families.

The Scope

These regional minimum standards serve as a harmonisation framework for regional approaches to PMTCT. They address a range of issues, including the prevention of HIV in women and couples, preventing unintended pregnancies, for preventing transmission of HIV from infected women to their infants, and the provision of care and support for HIV-infected women, their infants and families, as well as the integration of PMTCT into maternal and child health, and sexual and reproductive health services.

Key Points

The minimum standards call for the promotion of HIV testing and counselling (HTC) for couples, the provision of HTC as part of routine health care, and the promotion of services and commodities (such as contraceptives) to prevent unintended pregnancies. Provider-initiated testing and counselling must be available to pregnant women and their families as part of antenatal care services. PMTCT programmes must be available to all pregnant women living with HIV. Member States must seek to provide antiretroviral therapy (ART) to all pregnant women who are eligible for treatment, and treatment and care must also be extended to the father and other members of the family, according to need and the capacities of each Member State. Pregnant women with HIV infection who do not yet require ART must get ARV prophylactic regimens for PMTCT. Infant feeding, diagnostic testing and treatment guidelines are also presented. PMTCT must be integrated into other sexual and reproductive health, as well as maternal and child health programmes.

Implementation

Approval of the regional minimum standards involved all the relevant SADC structures. The minimum standards will be implemented through the coordination of national AIDS authorities, in collaboration with Ministries of Health, civil society organisations, international cooperating partners and other key stakeholders.

More Information

The full set of minimum standards for PMTCT is available in the publication, *Regional Minimum Standards for Harmonised Approaches to the Prevention of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV in the SADC Region (2010)*. The assessment of PMTCT programmes in the SADC region is contained in the publication, *Assessment Report on the Status of Mother-to-Child Transmission Programmes in the SADC Region (2010)*.

Both publications are available from the **Directorate of Social & Human Development & Special Programs (Private Bag 0095, Gaborone, Botswana)**.