

Vienna, 23 July 2010 – UNICEF experts in HIV and AIDS, gathered from over 35 countries, said that the just concluded International AIDS Conference re-affirmed the critical importance of preventing mother to child transmission of HIV. However stigma is still a major factor in keeping women and young people from accessing the services they need.

The number of children born with the virus every year is around 400,000. AIDS 2010 made the goal of effective elimination of HIV in newborns a worldwide priority.

UNICEF makes effective elimination of Mother to Child Transmission a primary focus of its work, Executive Director Tony Lake told the conference.

“We have the evidence and we have the momentum that we need to have,” said Jimmy Kolker, chief of HIV and AIDS, UNICEF. “The next wave of response should be shaped by reaching those hardest to reach so that coverage and follow up can be truly universal. Mother and child health and survival depend on it.”

The success of PMTCT depends in good part on focusing on difficult and sensitive issues, such as drug use in pregnant women with HIV.

“Drug dependent women everywhere in the world face very high levels of discrimination because of their drug use and their HIV status,” said Nina Ferencic, UNICEF Senior Advisor on HIV and AIDS in the CEE/CIS region and the co-author of the recently released report 'Blame and Banishment: The underground HIV epidemic affecting children in Eastern Europe and Central Asia'. “This social exclusion can lead to a mother avoiding antenatal care, or arriving just before delivery so the opportunity to prevent HIV transmission to her baby is lost. So the stigma makes the cycle of addiction and HIV even worse.”

The scale of the problem is enormous, and the response is inadequate both in scale and efficiency.

Protection of children affected by AIDS, challenges to prevention of HIV among adolescents, and services for HIV-positive young people were also topics of many sessions and seminars in Vienna.

Source: [UNICEF](#)