

AFRICA: UNICEF Calls for More Efforts to Reduce Mother-to-Child HIV Transmission

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Around 23 percent of HIV-positive pregnant women in Western and Central Africa received treatment to prevent their infants from becoming infected in 2009, up from 4 percent in 2005, UNICEF said Wednesday. Yet despite this improvement, many countries in the region are lagging behind in efforts to reduce mother-to-child HIV transmission.

"Reducing the number of new infections among children by 90 percent and the number of AIDS-related maternal deaths by 50 percent by 2015 is now within reach," though "a national priority for the countries concerned" is imperative, UNICEF said.

Western and Central Africa together account for 25 percent of the total number of pregnant women and children infected with HIV, according to the agency. "Protecting babies against the virus is a matter of political will and priority in the allocation of resources of the concerned states and donor states," said Jacques Hintzy, president of UNICEF France.

UNICEF France, the French Foreign Ministry, and the French Agency for Development gathered with leading pharmaceutical firms in Paris on Wednesday for a two-day meeting on reducing infant HIV transmission in Africa.

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