

New York State Has Met a CDC Goal for Elimination of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV in 2010

Once the epicenter of the national pediatric HIV epidemic, New York State met one of the two CDC goals for elimination of mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) of HIV in 2010.

Since routine HIV newborn screening began in New York in 1997, the number of cases of mother-to-child HIV transmission in the state has declined from 97 cases to just three in 2010, which is a rate of 0.7 percent. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has two goals for elimination of mother-to-child transmission. The first goal is a rate of less than 1 percent, which New York surpassed in 2010. The second goal is less than one baby born with HIV per 100,000 births, which New York came very close to meeting, with 1.3 cases per 100,000 births in 2010.

Since 1997, NYS's efforts are estimated to have saved at least 749 infants from a lifetime of living with HIV, averting more than \$215 million in HIV-related medical expenses for the care of these infants. This is a conservative estimate of the total costs averted and does not include costs for treating other conditions that HIV-positive children are prone to or costs for non-medical care of the children.

This remarkable public health accomplishment represents an almost 97 percent decline in cases of MTCT reported since 1997 (when newborn HIV screening was initiated), as well as a 74 percent decline in the number of HIV-positive women delivering annually since 1990. The dramatic reduction in MTCT provides a vivid illustration of the impact that a comprehensive public health approach to disease prevention can have.

According to Stephen W. Nicholas, M.D., a pioneer in the care of HIV-infected children and currently the Associate Dean for Admissions at the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons: "This success story is one of the great achievements in the history of public health. The progress achieved by New York State has been anything but straightforward or easy. There are many who should be commended for their efforts to address this devastating epidemic, including HIV-positive individuals and their families, the broad array of health care troops working to care for them, the NYSDOH AIDS Institute, the New York State Legislature, and the many others who played a role in this achievement."

Despite this impressive progress, more must be done in order to maintain the gains achieved. There are substantial challenges to sustaining elimination of MTCT. While NYS has seen a significant decline in the number of HIV-exposed births annually, there continue to be approximately 500 HIV-positive women who deliver babies in the state every year. These women and their infants will need ongoing state-of-the-art services tailored to their unique medical and psychosocial needs.

Future efforts will be guided by the recommendations of a NYS advisory panel, a group that includes women living with HIV and experts from all regions of NYS with experience in caring for HIV-positive women, including pregnant women, HIV-exposed infants and HIV-positive children. Guided by the advisory panel, the Department has developed a *Strategic Plan for the*

Elimination of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV. The *Strategic Plan* will be available on the Department of Health web site in the near future.

Without continued focus by all New Yorkers and our community partners, we will not be able to sustain elimination, and reach the most challenging goal, which is total eradication of MTCT, so that no child is infected perinatally with HIV. This goal will require collaboration with partners, including providers and consumers, in order to meet the needs of childbearing women and their children.

AIDS Institute Director Humberto Cruz, M.S., stated: “The AIDS Institute would like to thank the NYS women living with HIV and the vast array of NYS providers serving women and their children for their dedicated efforts that made this achievement possible. Since its inception in 1983, the Institute has collaborated with governmental and community partners at all levels to develop and successfully implement a comprehensive response to the HIV epidemic. The *Strategic Plan* is yet another means to seek continued collaboration with all partners in advancing opportunities to address the needs of NYS communities that remain at risk for HIV infection.”