

CAIRO/AMMAN, 25 September 2012 – The health of thousands of mothers and children in the Middle East and North Africa will receive a boost with a new initiative aimed at the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

The regional initiative, which is part of a larger global approach to combating HIV supported by WHO and UNICEF, will be launched in Cairo on 2 October, 2012. Coinciding with the 59th Session of the WHO Regional Committee for the Eastern Mediterranean, and attended by the Ministers of Health of countries of the Region, the launch event aims at urging Member States to ensure political commitment towards the elimination of new HIV infections among children and keeping their mothers alive, including allocating additional domestic resources and increasing public awareness for the elimination of new HIV infections in the Region.

Referring to the new initiative, Dr Ala Alwan, WHO Regional Director for the Eastern Mediterranean, noted that “While challenges remain, we are changing the course of this disease. Our knowledge of HIV has greatly improved and our potential ability to control the HIV epidemic has never been as strong. Among the many tools at our disposal are the knowledge and the means to prevent HIV among children”.

"Comprehensive prevention programmes targeting the most vulnerable and at-risk children and young people, as well as increased investments toward elimination of mother-to-child-transmission of HIV, will reverse the spread of this epidemic in the Middle East and North Africa," said Maria Calivis, UNICEF Regional Director for the Middle East and North Africa.

The WHO Eastern Mediterranean Region is one of two regions in the world with the fastest growing rate of HIV, with slow progress in preventing mother-to-child transmission of HIV. At the end of 2011, less than 5% of HIV-infected pregnant women received antiretroviral medicines for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, which is entirely preventable. It has virtually been eliminated in high-income countries, while progress is also being made in low- and middle-income countries.

To guide the way towards eliminating HIV in children and keeping mothers alive, WHO, UNICEF, UNFPA and UNAIDS have developed a regional framework for action, through a broad consultative process including regional experts, national HIV programme managers, civil

society organizations, international organizations working in the fields of maternal, neonatal and child health, sexual and reproductive health and HIV and representatives of people living with HIV.

The framework provides the Region with a common systematic approach and it will guide countries to develop plans consistent with their HIV epidemic profile and local realities. The bold targets are intended to catalyse the implementation at country level of quality interventions to prevent mother-to-child transmission on a scale necessary to guarantee impact.

The framework demonstrates the commitment of the region to the global call for the elimination of new HIV infections among children and keeping their mothers alive.

This goal is well positioned within the broader vision of improved HIV-free survival and maternal, child and reproductive health and is linked to global commitment to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Dr Alwan reiterated that the Regional Office, together with its partners, is committed to supporting countries in their efforts to reach this goal. He also pointed out that – in a world of many competing health priorities – reaching and sustaining elimination goals would require a high level of commitment and strong leadership at the national and regional levels.

Saturday 17th of May 2025 09:23:19 PM