

World Cup Shines Spotlight on AIDS

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The International Cricket Council (ICC) has teamed up with UNAids, the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) and the Caribbean Broadcast Media Partnership at the Cricket World Cup 2007 to highlight the situation of children and young people living with and affected by HIV/Aids.

More than two billion television viewers are expected to tune in to the seven-week long ICC event.

Activities at the event will draw attention to issues facing children affected by HIV and highlight the resources and actions required to address these. Players will wear red-and-blue ribbons during their opening group matches and also in the final.

The public, especially young people aged 15 to 24, will get information on the stigma and discrimination around HIV and on how to protect themselves against the virus. The partnership is part of the ICC's commitment to promoting the 'Spirit of Cricket' and its positive impact on society.

"The Spirit of Cricket is a special part of our game and is a concept that stretches beyond the boundaries of the outfield," said ICC President Percy Sonn.

"We hope the range of activities delivered at the ICC Cricket World Cup 2007 will make a difference in raising awareness and reducing stigma around HIV in the Caribbean and across the ever-growing cricket world. By encouraging high-profile players to support this campaign, we hope to be able to engage those who may otherwise be difficult to reach."

Through high-profile activities around cricket's biggest event, the ICC will support the "Unite for Children, Unite against Aids" campaign launched in 2005 by Unicef, UNAids and other partners.

A series of televised public services announcements (PSAs) has been produced, each one lasting 30 seconds, which will be available to broadcasters free of charge. The PSAs feature leading players, including Ricky Ponting from Australia and Rahul Dravid from India, speaking about how HIV affects children.

Players will also visit programmes supporting children and young people affected by HIV/Aids.

"Young people today have never known a world without Aids. Sports stars -- such as top cricket players -- can act as role models for today's young generation

and reach out to them on Aids issues," said UNAids executive director Dr Peter Piot.

"Sport is a force for change that can break down barriers, build self-esteem and teach life skills and social behaviour. By highlighting Aids issues, the ICC Cricket World Cup and its cricketing stars are showing exactly the kind of exceptional response needed for the exceptional challenge of Aids," he said.

The Unite for Children, Unite Against Aids campaign promotes four key areas: prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, the virus that causes Aids; increased access to antiretroviral therapy for children and young people who need treatment; education programmes to help prevent HIV transmission; and increased support for children who are orphaned and left vulnerable by Aids.

"Children have been the missing face of the Aids pandemic," said Unicef executive director Ann Veneman. "The ICC will be a powerful ally in ensuring that children are at the heart of the global response to the [pandemic]."

The ICC is also being supported in this effort by the Caribbean Broadcast Media Partnership on HIV/Aids (CBMP), a coalition of more than 50 broadcasters in 23 Caribbean countries and territories. The CBMP's new regional media campaign, Live Up, aims to inspire the people of the Caribbean, especially the youth, to consider what they can do to stem the spread of HIV.

"The exceptional reach of broadcast media in the Caribbean gives us a unique opportunity to educate audiences about how to avoid HIV, and how to combat the stigma and discrimination that surround the [pandemic]," noted CBMP steering committee chairperson Allyson Leacock.

"By doing what we do best, communicating with our neighbours, members of the CBMP are helping our audience to remain healthy and well-informed, while we all work together to reduce the impact of HIV in our region."

The CBMP is producing a series of PSAs as part of an ongoing media campaign, targeted at young people.

This will be debuted by Caribbean broadcasters during the event. The spots encourage young people to take action to prevent HIV infection, including talking openly with parents, teachers and friends about HIV, being informed, using protection and getting tested.

Viewers will be encouraged to visit a new website providing information, local resources and the stories of young people affected by HIV.

Cricket is popular in many of the countries that are most impacted by Aids, particularly India and South Africa. Together, these two countries are home to about 11-million of the 40-million people estimated to be living with HIV.

In the Caribbean, where the Cricket World Cup is being held, UNAids estimated that 250 000 people were living with HIV in 2006, 15 000 of which were children aged 0 to 14 years.

It was also estimated that in 2006, 1,1% of young women and 0,5% of young men aged 15 to 24 were living with HIV in the Caribbean and that about 27 000 people became newly infected with the virus in 2006 alone.

Cricket is also a major sport in many donor countries that are active in the global Aids response, including Australia, Canada, England, The Netherlands and New Zealand -- all competitors in the ICC Cricket World Cup 2007.