

## NEW HIV PREVENTION METHODS FACE DIFFICULT CHALLENGES

An array of promising new methods to prevent the spread of HIV may become reality in the near future, but most countries are unprepared to provide them to the hundreds of millions of people at risk of becoming infected, an international panel of experts reported at the XVI International AIDS Conference in Toronto in August [3]. Findings from large studies of some prevention methods, like the use of microbicides and male circumcision, are expected within the next five years the panel said. [1]

But the studies are complex, the methods will not offer a magic bullet to prevent infection, and whatever preventive techniques are found to be effective will need to be combined with existing prevention strategies, the panel of 50 experts cautioned. The experts also urged the world to address the practical and ethical challenges that they said threatened to slow or derail critical research projects on many prevention measures.

In addition to vaccines, circumcision, and microbicides (microbicides are gels or creams that could be inserted vaginally or rectally to block HIV infection), the report focused on three other methods that are being researched [2]: Diaphragms and other cervical barriers that could potentially assist in protecting women from HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases; A drug to suppress herpes, a virus which infects up to 70% of people in some parts of Africa. Herpes and other STDs significantly increase the risk for acquisition and transmission of HIV; Antiretroviral pills like tenofovir (Viread) that may also work to prevent. An analogy would be taking anti-malarial drugs before traveling to a malaria-infected area. A study of 400 at-risk women in Ghana found that tenofovir was safe for uninfected women. Findings about the drug's effectiveness are expected in the coming months.

As treatments have proven effective, "the harsh reality is we are quickly falling behind in HIV prevention," Dr. Helene Gayle said. No new preventive measure under study is likely to be 100% effective, a fact that will increase the difficulty of putting the methods into practice, the panel said, adding that educational campaigns will be needed to integrate the new methods with effective older ones.

The panel members cautioned AIDS workers to take steps to avert the complacency about risky behavior that could follow the broader use of effective preventions. More donor financing will be needed to introduce and deliver the new methods, the panel, known as the Global HIV Prevention Working Group, concluded. The panel members made a number of recommendations, including finding ways to help poor countries train enough health workers to carry out male circumcision safely [1].

Finally, while the world waits for the results of these studies, it is more critical than ever to focus on proven prevention measures and make them more widely available, because 4 million people are infected with HIV each year but fewer than one in five people who are at high risk for infection have access to such preventive measures.

### [CONTINUED... FROM COVER STORY, PAGE 1.]

#### POSSIBLE ANGLES:

- 1) How is the Caribbean region displaying its commitment to the theme of the International AIDS Conference, "Time to Deliver"?
- 2) Discuss the issues raised at the International AIDS Conference that most apply to the Caribbean, and highlight ways in which the region is responding to these difficulties.

#### RESOURCES

- [1] <http://www.aids2006.org/admin/images/upload/1242.pdf>
- [2] [www.kaisernetwork.org/aids2006](http://www.kaisernetwork.org/aids2006)
- [3] [http://www.unaids.org/en/HIV\\_data/2006GlobalReport/default.asp](http://www.unaids.org/en/HIV_data/2006GlobalReport/default.asp)

#### POSSIBLE ANGLES:

- 1) What are levels of access to existing, proven prevention strategies?
- 2) What challenges might these new prevention methods face in the Caribbean?
- 3) Is there a concern that people could become more complacent if they feel a new method to prevent HIV might be available?
- 4) Are local health care providers and community resources prepared to offer more comprehensive prevention regimens to community members?

#### RESOURCES

- [1] Lawrence R. Altman, M.D. Experts Warn Scientific Gains on HIV Not Enough. *New York Times*. August 16, 2006.
- [2] Florida & the Caribbean AIDS Education and Training Center: [www.faetc.org](http://www.faetc.org)
- [3] August 2006 Report "New Approaches to HIV Prevention: Accelerating Research and Ensuring Future Access". Available online at: <http://www.kff.org/hiv/aids/hiv081506pkg.cfm>



# AIDS News Digest

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#### UPCOMING REGIONAL EVENTS

October 16-18, 2006: Caribbean Coalition of National AIDS Programme Coordinators 5th Annual General Meeting & Capacity Building Workshop, Dominican Republic. CBMP will be presented at this event, with the intention of linking local AIDS Commissions to CBMP member broadcasters and activities, including tagging PSAs with local testing information.

October 19-22, 2006: Bi-annual French Antilles & Caribbean HIV/AIDS Symposium, Saint-Martin. The French Centers of Information and Care for Human Immune Deficiency (CISIH/COREVIH) of Martinique, Guadeloupe/Saint-Martin and French Guiana are scheduled to hold their 13th Bi-annual meeting in Saint-Martin (French West Indies). The purpose of this conference is to address the HIV/AIDS situation in the Caribbean, as well as to update knowledge on care, treatment and support teams.

December 1, 2006: World AIDS Day. A special CBMP "World AIDS Day" Programming Package will be distributed to all CBMP member broadcasters in mid-November.

## XVI INTERNATIONAL AIDS CONFERENCE CLOSURES WITH CALL TO DELIVER ON UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO PROVEN PREVENTION STRATEGIES, HIV CARE, AND TREATMENT [1]

A sense of hopefulness tempered with growing impatience marked the end of the XVI International AIDS Conference, held in August 2006 in Toronto. Scientists, clinicians, policymakers, people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) and other community leaders and caregivers called for an accelerated pace to scale up HIV prevention, care and treatment programs in resource-limited settings [2].

"The convergence of global stakeholders at AIDS 2006 has provided an ideal opportunity to examine the gap between what society is capable of doing in the face of this unprecedented humanitarian crisis and the actual level of response," said Conference Co-Chair Dr. Helene Gayle, outgoing President of the International AIDS Society (IAS) and President and CEO of CARE USA. "Despite important momentum over the past few years, the slow pace of progress has led to growing impatience. My hope is that we will use what we've learned here in Toronto to strengthen the global response."

"This conference cannot be deemed a success unless we collectively realize our theme of 'Time to Deliver'," said Conference Co-Chair Dr. Mark Wainberg, Local Host Board Chair and Director of the McGill University AIDS Centre. "Indeed, we will have failed unless we dramatically and rapidly expand by millions the numbers of people around the world with access to antiretroviral drugs and simultaneously scale up prevention. Progress cannot be achieved if more people become infected by HIV each year than the numbers that are able to access treatment."

According to the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), at the end of 2005 an estimated 39 million people worldwide were living with HIV/AIDS, the vast majority in developing countries. Last year, 4.1 million people became newly infected with the virus, and 2.8 million died of AIDS-related illnesses. Of the 6.8 million people living with HIV in low- and middle-income countries who are in need of antiretroviral medication (because the level of deterioration of their immune systems warrants beginning treatment), only 24% (1.6 million total) have access. The treatment access gap is even greater for children under 15: Just 8-13% of the 800,000 children in need of HIV treatment have access. There is also a significant global gap in access to prevention services, with fewer than one in five people at high risk for infection having access to effective prevention [3].

See PAGE 4 for POSSIBLE ANGLES and RESOURCES.

FOR MORE INFORMATION: For access to the Kaiser Family Foundation's policy research, analyses, reports and fact sheets, and media partnerships, visit the Foundation's main website at <http://www.kff.org>. For more information about reporting on HIV/AIDS, including relevant facts and figures, visit <http://www.globalhealthreporting.org/diseaseinfo.asp?id=23>.



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## MORE PEOPLE LEARN THEIR HIV STATUS WHEN RAPID TESTS ARE USED

In 2005, there were an estimated 37,000 new HIV infections and 27,000 AIDS-related deaths in the Caribbean [1]. Among those living with HIV/AIDS across the region, many have never been tested, do not know their status, and therefore do not receive timely treatment and care. But along with individuals who never get tested, many others take the test but do not return for their results, which may not be available for up to two weeks when conventional antibody tests are used.

New so-called “rapid HIV tests”, in which an oral swab or finger prick is used, can offer test results in as little as 20 minutes. According to a study presented at the recent XVI International AIDS Conference, use of rapid HIV tests greatly improves the chances that people who get tested will actually learn their results.

### POSSIBLE ANGLES:

- 1) Are rapid tests available in local hospitals and clinics? If not, what are the reasons that this new technology is not yet available in many parts of the Caribbean?
- 2) Are conventional testing methods still the most prominent in the region? Are there any initiatives in place to transition away from this model toward rapid testing and counseling?
- 3) Would communities be receptive to rapid tests?

### RESOURCES

- [1] Kaiser Family Foundation Caribbean HIV/AIDS fact sheet: <http://www.kff.org/hivaids/upload/7505-02.pdf>
- [2] CDC fact sheet on Oraquick rapid tests: <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/qa/oraqck.htm>
- [3] [http://www.hivandhepatitis.com/2006icr/16aids/docs/090106\\_d.html](http://www.hivandhepatitis.com/2006icr/16aids/docs/090106_d.html), by Liz Highleyman

## DRIVE TO STAMP OUT HIV/AIDS

A colorful motorcade with a serious purpose wound its way through three parishes in Barbados on August 26. It was aimed at encouraging Barbadians to make personal and corporate pledges to do away with the stigmatization of people living with HIV/AIDS.

The Caribbean Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) joined with corporate Barbados to commit itself to spreading this message. Scores of CBC staffers, entertainers, health officials and other partners from Scotiabank and the International Labour Organisation participated in the event. Scotiabank, a major sponsor of the initiative, noted that the HIV/AIDS motorcade was part of an ongoing outreach programme.

### POSSIBLE ANGLES:

- 1) How are local, cross-regional, and international businesses (like Scotiabank) contributing to the fight against HIV/AIDS?
- 2) Has the response to the epidemic from the business sector been appropriate or lacking? What more could be done or what services could they offer?

### RESOURCES

- [1] <http://www.cbc.bb/content/view/7077/10/>
- [2] International Labour Organization: <http://www.ilo.org/public/english/protection/trav/aids/countryprofile/tc/barbados.htm>

## NATIONAL HIV TESTING DAY BIG SUCCESS IN PUERTO RICO

Univision Puerto Rico joined the local Health Department for the 6th consecutive year to support National HIV Testing Day, celebrated on June 27th. As part of their commitment, they produced a PSA promoting the event, coordinated a media tour along with their news editions, produced a special news report, and drove viewers to a clinic for testing. As a result, a record 964 people came to the clinic and got tested in one day; an additional 200 were referred for testing at a later date because they arrived when the service was being closed. Last year, 600 people were tested. The campaign expectations were surpassed, and Univision has been thrilled with the results. According to a company spokesperson, the PSA is still running, “since we firmly believe this fight is not exclusive for June 27th or December 1st.”

### POSSIBLE ANGLES:

- 1) Have local PSAs compelled viewers to get tested?
- 2) Conduct a local opinion poll on what local people think about testing.

### RESOURCES:

- [1] Sheryll Perez, Univision

## CARICOM YOUTH TRAINED IN AIDS PROJECT DEVELOPMENT (8/23/06)

Fourteen young people from seven CARICOM member states participated in a facilitator’s workshop in Antigua under the Mini-Grant Project (MGP) of the CARICOM Youth Ambassador initiative [2]. The MGP seeks to build the capacity of young people to develop HIV/AIDS projects, aimed at reducing the impact of the pandemic on young people in high-risk communities [1].

The workshop, which was held from August 17-19 at the Heritage Hotel, was facilitated by consultant Robert Dabney, who described it as “part of the continuing process that CARICOM has in place to empower young people around the region.” Participants were drawn from Grenada, St. Vincent & the Grenadines, St. Lucia, St. Kitts/Nevis, Belize, the Bahamas and Trinidad & Tobago.

Following the training session, participants will in turn facilitate MGP sessions in other CARICOM states and associate members. Dabney provided a facilitator’s manual on community mapping resources, HIV/AIDS sensitisation and project and proposal development writing, and discussed appropriate techniques to deliver the modules. He is convinced that the goal of the workshop was achieved, saying, “I think the sessions were excellent. The participants were engaged. They are very bright and challenged me as the workshop leader every step of the way, asking insightful questions. Sessions like this convince me that, especially in the Caribbean, our future is in good hands with the young people that we have today.”

### POSSIBLE ANGLES:

- 1) Follow up with CARICOM representatives on their plans to implement the skills obtained at this conference in their communities.
- 2) More generally, what is the role of young people in the struggle against HIV/AIDS?
- 3) What other resources are available to youth to sufficiently fill this role?

### RESOURCES:

- [1] <http://www.antiguasun.com/paper?as=view&sun=281935077507132005&an=291328096508232006&ac=Local>
- [2] [www.caricom.org](http://www.caricom.org)

The CARICOM Secretariat was represented by Patricia McPherson of the Education Unit of the Directorate of Human and Social development.

## POPE URGES CATHOLICS TO COMBAT HIV/AIDS, OTHER PROBLEMS WITH FAITH

Catholics need to rely on faith, in addition to science, to deal with the problems of the world, including HIV/AIDS, Pope Benedict XVI said on Sunday, September 10, during an outdoor Mass in Munich, Germany, the Los Angeles Times reports. “Social issues and the Gospel are inseparable. When we bring people only knowledge, ability, technical competence and tools, we bring them too little,” the pope said. (He added, “Hearts must be converted if progress is to be made on social issues and reconciliation is to begin, and if, for example, AIDS is to be combated by realistically facing its deeper issues.”) The pope’s message reiterated the Catholic Church’s teaching that abstinence until marriage and fidelity — not condoms — are the best way to prevent the spread of HIV, AP/Yahoo! News reports. According to Munich police spokesperson Peter Reichl, about 250,000 people attended the Mass.

AIDS activists worldwide have criticized the Catholic Church’s position on condom use as an effective prevention mechanism in the fight against HIV/AIDS. They cite numerous scientific studies which have proven that condoms, when used correctly and consistently, are highly effective at preventing the spread of HIV between sexual partners.

### POSSIBLE ANGLES:

- 1) What role do religious institutions play in the Caribbean in efforts to treat and prevent the HIV/AIDS epidemic?
- 2) Has religion helped or hindered this fight?

### RESOURCES:

- [1] [www.kaisernetwork.org/daily\\_reports/rep\\_index.cfm?hint=4&DR\\_ID=39730](http://www.kaisernetwork.org/daily_reports/rep_index.cfm?hint=4&DR_ID=39730)
- [2] [www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-pope11sep11,1,239469.story?ctrack=1&cset=true](http://www.latimes.com/news/nationworld/world/la-fg-pope11sep11,1,239469.story?ctrack=1&cset=true)
- [3] [http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20060910/ap\\_on\\_re\\_eu/germany\\_pope\\_visit\\_14](http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20060910/ap_on_re_eu/germany_pope_visit_14)