

Ja. Achieving Success In Reducing Mother-To-Child HIV Transmission

Director of Health Promotion and Protection in the Ministry of Health, Dr. Eva Lewis-Fuller, has said that Jamaica has achieved significant success in reducing mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

She noted that the incidence of transmission has been reduced by more than 50 per cent since 2004. "HIV testing of pregnant mothers has been in the region of 90 per cent, and 84 per cent of them, who have been found to be infected, have received treatment. As for the paediatric AIDS, there were only 27 (cases) in 2007 compared with 73 the year before," she informed. Dr. Lewis-Fuller was addressing the opening ceremony of the Caribbean Coalition of National AIDS Programme Co-ordinators' (CCNAPC) best practice workshop yesterday (June 21) at the Jamaica Pegasus hotel in New Kingston. She said that by many indicators, Jamaica is above average in providing paediatric antiretroviral treatment, noting that coverage is 55 per cent while the rest of the Caribbean is about 38 per cent. Under the Ministry's prevention of mother-to-child transmission programme, free antiretroviral (ARV) therapy is provided to HIV-positive mothers, including post delivering treatment for mother and baby, to reduce transmission. Testing is more widely available, and voluntary testing is encouraged, with counselling provided for infected mothers. The five-day CCNAPC workshop, which is held in conjunction with the National HIV/STI Programme in the Ministry of Health, brings together, representatives of HIV/AIDS programme from across the region, to share best practices in the delivery of treatment and care. Jamaica's programme will be looked at as a model over the five days. Ms. Lewis-Fuller said the workshop is an ideal opportunity for regional programme co-ordinators to get a better understanding of Jamaica's efforts to control HIV and AIDS. "We hope that we can share with you what we are doing. We know that our programme is not perfect and you too will have experiences that we can learn from. to make our programme better as we exchange ideas and facts," she said. Among the objectives of the workshop are to: strengthen the capacity of those responsible for the development and implementation of prevention programmes for populations at risk for HIV; enhance the capacity of participants to more effectively and efficiently deliver HIV prevention services directed to most at risk persons; expose participants to best practice interventions and programmes that have cultural relevance and that can be replicated; and establish a network of on-going support to ensure sustainability of programmes and interventions. CCNAPC strives to empower its members to build strong national, territorial and regional responses to HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean by reinforcing member leadership and building programme management capacity, primarily through peer collaboration. This is achieved through advocacy and policy assesment and development; the strengthening of membership capacity; facilitating technical assistance; increasing collaboration among members and key regional and international stakeholders; and developing regional and international alliances. Membership consists of 35 countries and territories throughout the Caribbean.