

## MOH Launches National Paediatric AIDS Elimination Initiative

Minister of Health, Hon. Dr. Fenton Ferguson, says the Government is working towards the total elimination of mother to child transmission of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and syphilis in Jamaica by 2015.

This will be done under the National Paediatric AIDS Elimination Initiative, which was launched at the Wyndham Hotel in New Kingston on Friday December 21.

Director of Health Promotion and Protection in the Ministry of Health, Dr. Kevin Harvey, read a statement by the Health Minister, in which he outlined that the programme will seek to ensure that the rate of mother to child transmission of HIV is equal to, or less than, two per cent (0.3 cases per 1000 live births); and the incidence of congenital syphilis equal to, or less than 0.5 cases per 1000 live births.

He noted that since 2002, Jamaica has been able to reduce mother to child transmission of HIV from 25 per cent to less than five per cent through appropriate interventions.

Dr. Ferguson pointed out that under this new initiative, the Ministry, in collaboration with its partners, the University of the West Indies and the National Health Fund (NHF), are not only seeking to build on the gains made thus far, but also to totally eliminate vertical mother to child transmission of HIV and syphilis over the next three years.

"Three of the eight Millennium Development Goals the world commits to achieving by 2015, speaks to combating HIV/AIDS, reducing child mortality and improving maternal health. Under the Paediatric AIDS Elimination Initiative, Jamaica will be able to make further progress in all three areas," he stated.

Dr. Ferguson also informed that under the programme, the four regional health authorities will continue to provide follow-up patient care to HIV infected mothers and their babies, at the island's major obstetric hospitals and clinics.

The Minister said the fight against HIV/AIDS is entrenched in the policy initiatives being pursued by the Ministry, and by extension Jamaica, to create an all-embracing health system based on quality care.

He further remarked that the goal is to bring health services closer to the community, pointing out that the regional health authorities have a key role to play in this regard.

The Health Minister also pointed out that stigma and discrimination are major barriers to achieving further success in the national response to the HIV epidemic.

"It requires a collective effort from us all in the health system to ensure that stigma and discrimination does not enter or stay in our facility," he said. "Stigma and discrimination have the potential to cripple any effort towards complete elimination of vertical mother to child transmission of HIV and we must guard against this."

He noted that the Ministry is committed to ensuring that those who provide health services are continuously sensitised and trained to adopt more accepting attitudes and deliver professional and confidential service towards all persons seeking health care.