

Key HIV/STI Prevention Messages for Pregnant and Postpartum Women

1 As a pregnant/postpartum woman, you may be at increased risk for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).

- Some male partners of pregnant or postpartum women may be more likely to have other sexual partners in periods of potentially less-frequent sexual relations, such as during pregnancy and postpartum.
- You may be at greater risk postpartum due to vaginal lesions and abrasions following labour and delivery.

2 Your child is at risk of acquiring HIV during pregnancy, labour, delivery, and breastfeeding if you are HIV-positive.

- The best way to prevent your child from becoming HIV-positive is by staying HIV-negative yourself through safer sexual practises.
- Without intervention, about one-third of infants born to HIV-positive mothers will become infected with HIV.
- If you are HIV-positive, there are ways to reduce the risk of transmitting HIV to your children—through safer delivery practises, through counselling and support for infant feeding in the context of HIV, and through use of antiretroviral drugs.

3 As a pregnant/postpartum woman, you can reduce your risk of acquiring HIV and other STIs by adopting safer sexual practises, including consistent and correct condom use.

- Know how HIV and other STIs are transmitted and how to prevent becoming infected.
- Marriage and stable relationships do not automatically protect you from HIV and other STIs, because your partner may have other partners.

4 Communicating with your sexual partner is important for preventing HIV and other STIs.

Gain skills to improve communication with your sexual partners about:

- HIV risks during pregnancy and postpartum
- Safer sex practises, such as using condoms and reducing your number of sexual partners
- Benefits of getting tested for HIV

5 When you use condoms consistently and correctly, you can prevent infection with HIV and other STIs and unintended pregnancies.

If you encounter resistance to condom use from your partner, seek relevant prevention counselling services to help you learn to negotiate condom use and become empowered to reduce your vulnerability to HIV.

6

Involving your partner in health care during pregnancy and the postpartum period can help you to discuss HIV/STI prevention and contraception.

- Some men may be more receptive to attending health services when their partner is pregnant because they are interested in the health of their family.
- Involving your partner in reproductive health, including family planning, can encourage use of safer sexual practises and prevent future unintended pregnancies.

7

Know your HIV status, and consider going for voluntary counselling and testing for HIV to protect your health and the health of your family.

- Voluntary counselling and testing for HIV provides HIV prevention counselling to help you learn ways to practise safer sex that will help you and your partner reduce the risk of HIV.
- If you test positive for HIV, prevention counselling can help you develop strategies to avoid transmitting HIV to others and can help you get the best treatment, care, and support available.

8

When you are HIV-negative or do not know your HIV status, exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months postpartum is recommended, with the introduction of appropriate complementary foods at about six months.

- Exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life can help infants achieve optimal growth, development, and health.
- For HIV-positive women, replacement feeding is recommended if it is acceptable, feasible, affordable, sustainable, and safe. Otherwise, breastfeeding is recommended for the first few months.
- Know your HIV status and make informed decisions about the most appropriate infant feeding options.

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You have the right to access health services free from stigma and discrimination.

Health care services should be provided regardless of your HIV status, socioeconomic background, gender, age, marital status, occupation, or any other reasons.

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Inequitable gender relations may result in a lack of power for women to protect themselves from HIV and other STIs.

You can become empowered to exercise your sexual and reproductive health rights, including getting tested for HIV, practising safer sex, and accessing quality health care.