



Letter of support for a universal antenatal HIV screening program in Israel

WAVE Scientific Committee

Dr Karoline Aebi-Popp, Co-Chair
University Hospital Bern
Bern, Switzerland

Prof Antonella d'Arminio Monforte
Azienda Ospedaliera-Polo Universitario
San Paolo
Milan, Italy

Dr Teresa Branco
Hospital Fernando Fonseca
Amadora, Portugal

Prof Margaret Johnson
Royal Free Hospital
London, United Kingdom

Dr Justyna Kowalska, Co-Chair
Medical University of Warsaw
Warsaw, Poland

Dr Inga Latysheva
Republican Clinical Hospital of Infectious
Diseases
Saint-Petersburg, Russian Federation

Dr Mona Loutfy
Women's College Research Institute
University of Toronto
Toronto, Canada

Prof Fiona Mulcahy
St James's Hospital
Dublin, Ireland

Dr Maria Jesus Pérez-Elias
Ramón y Cajal Hospital
Madrid, Spain

Anette Piecha
Kompetenznetz HIV/AIDS e.V.
Frankfurt/Main, Germany

Ben Collins
International HIV Partnership
London, United Kingdom

WAVE's (Women Against Viruses in Europe) mission is to promote the welfare of HIV-positive women. The initiative involves healthcare professionals and community representatives. WAVE endeavours to promote equality of access to care and excellence in standards of care for women living with HIV. Being part of EACS (European Aids Clinical Society) gives WAVE a unique position to advise on guidelines in regard to women and HIV as well as to provide expert advice.

We would like to support a policy of universal antenatal HIV screening in Israel for the following reasons:

HIV screening in pregnancy is an important measure to avoid mother to child transmission (MTCT) of HIV worldwide even if the estimated prevalence of antenatal HIV in certain settings is very low. The most important step in the prevention of vertical transmission is the identification of HIV in pregnant women before or during pregnancy, as most transmissions do occur in women who are not screened. If women with HIV are identified before delivery the risk of transmission can be reduced from as high as 30% to around less than 1 %. In addition, universal HIV testing in pregnancy recognizes that early detection and treatment can not only benefit the mother and her infant, but also her sexual partners and for future pregnancies. Studies have shown that if antenatal HIV screening is limited to high-risk women, 50% care cases of HIV in pregnant women will be missed.

Therefore we believe that there is currently sufficient evidence to recommend a policy change to universal antenatal screening in all settings.

To introduce such a policy it is crucial to involve midwives, nurses and doctors to guarantee feasibility, and effectiveness in terms of providing good counselling around the aim to prevent any MTCT of HIV.

In general, women should be tested for HIV during routine prenatal testing, on an opt-out basis where possible. The opt-out approach requires that all women be informed that testing is routine and will be performed, although they have of course the right to refuse. If all women received routine HIV testing, the stigma of such testing would be reduced, and women who refused testing would be in the minority.

Women at high risk for HIV, including injection drug users and women with multiple sex partners during their pregnancy, should be tested again in their third trimester. Women who have not been tested should be offered rapid screening when in labour, and if the rapid test is positive, they should start antiretroviral therapy while waiting for results from a confirmatory test.

We strongly believe that antenatal HIV screening should be considered a standard of care.

Dr Justyna Kowalska
WAVE Co-Chair

Dr Karoline Aebi-Popp
WAVE Co-Chair

Prof. Fiona Mulcahy
EACS President