



HIV AND AIDS

CHILDREN ARE FALLING BEHIND IN THE RACE TO END AIDS

Support them on World AIDS Day, 1 December. In 2020, the world slowed down in the race to end AIDS. After some big successes a few years ago, last year the targets were missed, says a report published by the World Health Organization (WHO).

“Despite early and dramatic progress, despite more tools and knowledge than ever before, children are falling way behind adults”, says Shannon Hader, UNAIDS Deputy Executive Director, Programme, who is quoted in the WHO report.

This matters because time is short. 50% of infants living with AIDS die before their second birthday if they aren’t treated, say the authors.

Children are 5% of cases, but 15% of deaths

“Children are nearly 40% less likely than adults to be on life-saving treatment (54% of children versus 74% of adults)” says the WHO report, and children also account for “a disproportionate number of deaths”.

Success in previous years came from eliminating HIV infections in children and also caring for their mothers, the authors explain.

They say the aim is:

- to ensure that every child has an HIV-free beginning,
- that they stay HIV-free through adolescence,
- and that every child and adolescent living with HIV has access to antiretroviral therapy.

COVID-19 and school closures made things worse in 2020

COVID-19 and the measures taken against it have been disruptive, according to the report. They have lowered the educational, and sexual and reproductive health services for adolescent girls and young women. HIV-prevention efforts have been affected, say the authors.

Rapid gains are possible if we renew our efforts

The tools are there, they just need to be used, says the report.

UNAIDS calls on countries to set “bold but achievable” HIV targets, say the authors. If they are met, the world will be back on track with its goal of ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030, says UNAIDS in the report.

Young people living with HIV speak up

“As a young activist, I believe ... it’s time to take our lives and our leadership in our own hands. Let us end this epidemic, once and for all.” This quote is from an interview International Aids Society conducted with Grace, a young woman in Malawi who was born with HIV, but only found out when she was tested at the age of ten.

13 years later, she supports teenagers living with HIV. “Our goal is to engage young people through awareness campaigns that provide information on where to access youth-friendly health services”, she says. “Through direct action, our voices and needs are heard, and we can effect lasting change” declares this once isolated, but now connected and vocal champion for young people living with HIV.