



**World Health  
Organization**

# **RAPID ADVICE**

**Use of antiretroviral drugs for treating pregnant women  
and preventing HIV infection in infants**

NOVEMBER 2009

WHO Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Rapid advice: use of antiretroviral drugs for treating pregnant women and preventing HIV infection in infants, November 2009.

1.Antiretroviral agents - pharmacology. 2.HIV infections - therapy. 3.HIV infections - prevention and control. 4.Disease transmission, Vertical - prevention and control. 5.Pregnant women. 6.Guidelines. 7.Developing countries. I.World Health Organization.

ISBN 978 92 4 159893 4

(NLM classification: WC 503.2)

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Printed in Switzerland



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# Contents

|      |  |    |
|------|--|----|
| 1.   | Overview   | 4  |
| 1.1  | Background   | 4  |
| 1.2  | Why a revision?  | 4  |
| 1.3  | Guiding principles   | 4  |
| 2.   | Recommendations at a glance  | 5  |
| 3.   | The revision process   | 6  |
| 3.1. | Retrieving, summarizing and presenting the evidence  | 6  |
| 3.2  | Consensus, external review and updating  | 6  |
| 3.3  | Publication and timing   | 7  |
| 4.   | Adaptation, implementation and evaluation  | 8  |
| 5.   | Companion documents  | 9  |
| 6.   | Declarations of interest   | 10 |
| 7.   | Collaboration with external partners   | 11 |
| 8.   | Key recommendations  | 12 |
| 8.1  | ART for HIV-infected pregnant women who need treatment for their own health                        | 12 |
| 8.2  | ARV prophylaxis for all HIV-infected pregnant women who do not need treatment for their own health | 13 |
| 9.   | Annex 1  | 16 |

# 1. Overview

## 1.1 Background

The World Health Organization (WHO) worked on the revision of the *Use of antiretroviral drugs for treating pregnant women and preventing HIV infection in infants: recommendations for a public health approach, 2006*, through a series of coordinated efforts to review and synthesize emerging evidence. The key areas of review are:

- a. when to start and what antiretroviral therapy (ART) to give to pregnant women living with HIV who are eligible for ART; and
- b. when to start and what antiretroviral (ARV) prophylaxis to give to pregnant women who do not need ART for their own health, but need ARVs to reduce the risk of mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) of HIV.

This evidence was assembled following systematic reviews, GRADE profile analysis, consultations with key implementers, cost review, and peer review.

Various individuals were involved in the development of these recommendations: the Core Writing Group consisting of WHO staff and external experts, the full Guideline Review Committee, and the Peer Review Group. The members are listed in Annex 1.

The aim was to identify evidence-based recommendations that would be likely to deliver high quality care. The evidence and its quality, risks and benefits, acceptability, feasibility, cost and financial implications, were considered by the Guideline Review Committee and the Peer Review Group, who agreed on a series of updated recommendations.

## 1.2 Why a revision?

The availability of a significant amount of new evidence on ARV prophylaxis to prevent MTCT, as well as new information on optimal timing for ART initiation (treatment eligibility) warrants development of revised 2009 guidelines. Particularly important is the evidence indicating the benefits of starting ARV prophylaxis for PMTCT earlier during pregnancy, and new data indicating that extended ARV prophylaxis to mothers or infants is effective in substantially decreasing the risk of HIV transmission through breastfeeding. Revision of the guidelines provides an important opportunity to simplify and standardize current recommendations, and to provide updated normative guidance for more effective PMTCT interventions in both resource-limited settings and globally. Once implemented, these recommendations can reduce MTCT risk to less than 5% in breastfeeding populations

(from a background risk of 35%) and in non-breastfeeding populations (from a background risk of 25%), and will help promote improved maternal and child health and survival. More effective interventions in resource-limited settings make it possible for low and middle income countries to target the virtual elimination of MTCT and paediatric HIV/AIDS, as has already been achieved in many countries.

It provides guidance to policy-makers and programme managers responsible for national PMTCT programmes, and is a resource document for health care workers involved in the prevention, care and treatment of pregnant women and their infants. The guidance also provides a normative framework to international and bilateral funding and implementation and support agencies.

This *Rapid advice* focuses on two key areas:

1. When to start and what ART to give to pregnant women living with HIV who are eligible for ART; and
2. When to start and what ARV prophylaxis to give to pregnant women who do not need ART for their own health, but need ARVs to reduce the risk of MTCT.

## 1.3 Guiding principles

The WHO guidelines on the use of ARV drugs for treating pregnant women and preventing HIV infection in infants were revised in accordance with the following guiding principles:

1. Women (including pregnant women) in need of ARV drugs for their own health should receive life-long ART.
2. A CD4 cell count available antenatally is critically important for decision-making with regard to maternal ART eligibility.
3. Recommended interventions should be aimed at maximizing the effectiveness of reducing vertical HIV transmission, minimizing the side effects for both mothers and infants, and preserving future HIV care and treatment options.
4. Effective postpartum ARV-based interventions will allow safer breastfeeding practices.
5. Simple unifying principles for different country settings are needed.

## 2. Recommendations at a glance

The PMTCT recommendations refer to two key approaches:

1. Lifelong ART for HIV-positive women in need of treatment.
2. Prophylaxis, or the short-term provision of ARVs, to prevent HIV transmission from mother to child.

This provides the basis for:

1. Earlier ART for a larger group of HIV-positive pregnant women to benefit both the health of the mother and prevent HIV transmission to her child during pregnancy.
2. Longer provision of antiretroviral ARV prophylaxis for HIV-positive pregnant women with relatively strong immune systems who do not need ART for their own health. This would reduce the risk of HIV transmission from mother to child.
3. Provision of ARVs to the mother or child to reduce the risk of HIV transmission during the breastfeeding period. For the first time, there is enough evidence for WHO to recommend ARVs while breastfeeding.

# 3. The revision process

## 3.1. Retrieving, summarizing and presenting the evidence

WHO convened an expert consultation in November 2008 to review new evidence accumulated since the 2006 guidelines. This consultation helped WHO to compile the evidence and make a decision whether there was enough new evidence to warrant the revision of the 2006 guidelines.

Following this initial meeting, WHO drafted the scope of work and developed PICO\* questions to the key areas of review. GRADE profiles were prepared for four PICO questions:

- a. when to start ART in pregnant women; and what to give to pregnant women eligible for ART,
- b. when to start ARV prophylaxis in pregnant women, and what to give pregnant women for ARV prophylaxis,
- c. what to give newborn infants in the immediate postpartum, and
- d. what to give breastfeeding-exposed infant beyond the immediate postpartum period.

Based on the PICO questions, systematic review of peer-reviewed literature and abstracts was performed through a collaborative effort between UCSF, CDC and WHO. The HIV/AIDS Cochrane Collaborative Review Group search strategy was used for each of the four key questions.

An informal two day meeting with key stakeholders, co-hosted by PEPFAR, was held in Washington in September 2009. This meeting helped assess the feasibility of potential new recommendations and the challenges that countries may face in revising their national guidelines.

A second feasibility assessment was done through a rapid assessment in the form of a structured questionnaire.

Additional considerations on the feasibility of relevant PMTCT interventions were provided through a presentation on: *the health-systems considerations of PMTCT programmes* presented during the Guidelines Review meeting.

Cost information and implications were prepared by WHO for key ART regimens and ARV prophylaxis regimens taking into account

the different pricing in low-income, lower-middle income and upper-middle income countries. Pricing information was based on the Global Price Reporting Mechanism (GPRM, <http://apps.who.int/hiv/amds/price/hdd/>). Cost implications of the proposed recommendations were presented and discussed during the Guidelines review meeting.

GRADE evidence profiles will be included in the full guideline.

## 3.2 Consensus, external review and updating

The *Guidelines review meeting on the use of antiretroviral drugs for treating pregnant women and preventing HIV infection in infants* was held in Geneva from 19–21 October, 2009. The meeting reviewed evidence around the four key areas in different sessions. Each of the sessions included presentations on the related GRADE evidence, current and proposed recommendations, cost implications, and the risk-benefit analysis of the key questions. Discussions were held both in plenary and in group work sessions.

The proposed recommendations were reviewed and the final recommendation(s) were formulated, taking into consideration the quality of evidence, the balance between benefits and harms, the balance between values and preferences, cost, feasibility, and other factors. If outcomes of GRADE analysis were inconclusive, other factors as listed above were taken into consideration in making a recommendation. For consensus reaching, the group took into account the factors listed above and went through the risk-benefit tables to make decisions on recommendations. In few cases where there was no initial consensus, there was further discussion and decisions were reached by voting. The key recommendations were summarized in 'recommendation tables' according to the four main questions, and included a summary of key factors that were considered in making the recommendations.

The summary recommendations were sent for peer review to six independent peer reviewers and the six WHO regional offices. They also received the risk-benefit tables that include the strength of the evidence and the strength of the recommendation and were asked to provide feedback on whether they agreed with the recommendations or not, and if not why; and whether there are any key points that are not addressed that are important to be included. Feedback was received in writing from all of the reviewers. Representing different countries and perspectives, there was overall strong support for the proposed recommendations.

\* PICO is an acronym that describes the elements of a well-formed clinical question. The structure includes: 'P' for the patient or population; 'I' for the intervention of interest; 'C' for comparison; and 'O' for outcome

Comments received from peer review were shared with the core writing group by teleconference. The draft recommendations and recommendation tables were reviewed again, and finalized.

Based on all of the above mentioned steps the final summary recommendations were finalized and submitted to the WHO Guideline Review Committee for approval in early November 2009.

The current guidelines are to be reviewed in 2012, unless significant new evidence emerges before and warrants a review process earlier.

### 3.3 Publication and timing

This *Rapid advice: use of antiretroviral drugs for treating pregnant women and preventing HIV infection in infants* will be published online in English and French.

Two guideline writers have been contracted to assist in developing the revised 2009 guidelines. It is anticipated that the full guidelines will be available in February 2010 for final clearance. Publication and dissemination is estimated to start in March or April 2010. The guidelines target national-level policy and decision-makers, programme managers and managers responsible for designing and implementing PMTCT programmes, including ART for women.

## 4. Adaptation, implementation and evaluation

WHO is working closely with UN and other implementing partners, as part of the IATT (InterAgency Task Team), the PEPFAR PMTCT/Peds technical working group, and WHO regional offices to plan for rapid dissemination and implementation of the new guidelines. Much experience has been obtained from the dissemination of the previous guidelines, and active support for guideline revision at country level is needed. Key steps in the dissemination include:

1. Translation into at least three other languages (French, Spanish and Russian). This will be in both hard copies and web documents.
2. Rapid development of an adaptation guide, in conjunction with implementing partners. This adaptation guide will include a process feedback document that will provide WHO with important information on the quality, usefulness and impact of the guidelines.
3. Briefings, support and joint planning for dissemination with IATT partners, PEPFAR, Global Fund, etc.
4. Regional workshops to disseminate the guidelines and support country adaptation. (Nearly all WHO regions have included this in their workplans for 2010, and PEPFAR has provided specific support for joint regional workshops.)
5. Rapid country adaptation — WHO will work directly with 2-3 high burden countries to support the rapid adaptation and implementation of the new guidelines, in order to learn first-hand how to accelerate the process.

## 5. Companion documents

Simple tools to accompany the guideline are being developed in collaboration with key implementing partners. These tools are designed to:

- assist countries in the revision of the national PMTCT guidelines and
- support the choice of regimen taking into account the resources and limitations within the country.

The first of these important tools is this rapid advice document.

## 6. Declarations of interest

Forms were collected from every member of each group. All individuals attending the Guidelines review meeting completed the required declaration of conflict of interest form. Altogether five individuals declared some conflict of interest: L Kuhn, S Luchters, R Shapiro, and L Guay each declared receiving research support in the past and present. None of the participants received funding from pharmaceutical companies. The support is mainly as research grants from universities and government funding. The WHO Secretariat felt that the declarations did not represent significant conflicts (standard publicly funded research support) and would not unduly affect the individual's judgment or the outcome of the meeting. The declaration from E Nyankesha was not seen as a conflict of interest. A Mushavi from the Peer review group declared some conflict but the WHO Secretariat did not feel that the magnitude of the disclosure warrants any further clearance.

## 7. Collaboration with external partners

There are no external collaborators specific to this *Rapid advice*. However, several partners have been engaged in the development of the guideline. All collaborations will be detailed in the full guideline.

Funding to support this work comes from PEPFAR and UNAIDS.

## 8. Key recommendations

### 8.1 ART for HIV-infected pregnant women who need treatment for their own health

#### RECOMMENDATION 1

In pregnant women with confirmed HIV serostatus, initiation of ART for her own health is recommended for all HIV-infected pregnant women with CD4 cell count  $\leq 350$  cells/mm<sup>3</sup>, irrespective of WHO clinical staging; and for all HIV-infected pregnant women in WHO clinical stage 3 or 4, irrespective of CD4 cell count.

(Strong recommendation, moderate quality evidence)

*Remarks: The criteria for initiating ART for pregnant women are the same as for non-pregnant women. The recommendation places a high value on the health of the woman and a relatively low value on the potential risks and increased cost. Available data show that maternal ART during pregnancy and continued during breastfeeding is efficacious in reducing HIV transmission or infant death, and is the most effective intervention for promoting the HIV-infected mother's health and decreasing HIV transmission risk in this group with the highest risk of mother-child HIV transmission.*

TABLE 1. Eligibility criteria for ART or ARV prophylaxis in HIV-infected pregnant women

| CD4 cell count available             |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| CD4 $\leq 350$ cells/mm <sup>3</sup> | CD4 $> 350$ cells/mm <sup>3</sup>       |
| ART<br>Regardless of clinical stage  | ART<br>If symptomatic<br>(Stage 3 or 4) |

| WHO clinical stage |                 |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| Stage 1            | ARV prophylaxis |
| Stage 2            | ARV prophylaxis |
| Stage 3            | ART             |
| Stage 4            | ART             |

#### RECOMMENDATION 2

HIV-infected pregnant women in need of ART for their own health should start ART irrespective of gestational age and continue throughout pregnancy, delivery and thereafter. (See table 2).

(Strong recommendation, moderate quality evidence)

*Remarks: The timing of ART initiation for HIV-infected pregnant women is the same as for non-pregnant women, i.e. as soon as eligibility criteria are met. The recommendation places a high value on the health of the woman. It places relatively low value on the potential risks for the mother and unborn infant.*

#### RECOMMENDATION 3

In pregnant women in need of ART for their own health, the preferred first-line ART regimen should include an AZT + 3TC backbone: AZT + 3TC + NVP or AZT + 3TC + EFV. Alternative regimens that are recommended include TDF + 3TC (or FTC) + NVP and TDF + 3TC (or FTC) + EFV\*.

(Strong recommendation, low quality evidence)

*Remarks: The preferred first-line ART regimens recommended for HIV-infected pregnant women are the same as for non-pregnant women. The recommendation places a high value on the health of the mother and the benefits on MTCT. It places relatively low value on the potential drug toxicity risks for the mother and unborn infant. The decision should be guided by the experience, availability and potential toxicity of these regimens in pregnancy. EFV-based regimens should not be newly-initiated during the first trimester of pregnancy (see also adult ART guidelines).*

\* AZT: zidovudine; 3TC: lamivudine; NVP: nevirapine; EFV: efavirenz; TDF: tenofovir; FTC: emtricitabine; XTC: 3TC or FTC

## RECOMMENDATION 4

Infants born to HIV-infected women receiving ART for their own health should receive

- a. for breastfeeding infants: daily NVP from birth until 6 weeks of age  
(*Strong recommendation, moderate quality evidence*)
- b. for non-breastfeeding infants: daily AZT or NVP from birth until 6 weeks of age  
(*Conditional recommendation, low quality evidence*)

*Remarks: The recommendation places a high value on preventing perinatal transmission of HIV and providing additional protection to the newborn infant in addition to the protection received from the mother's ART regimen. Among breastfeeding infants, there is evidence that daily NVP for 6 weeks is efficacious in reducing HIV transmission or death. Among non-breastfeeding infants, there is no evidence assessing the efficacy of daily NVP for any duration beyond a single dose at birth. However, there is high quality of evidence that 6 weeks of daily infant AZT prophylaxis in conjunction with maternal antepartum AZT prophylaxis for more than 4 weeks significantly prevents MTCT. There is additional evidence that AZT for 6 weeks to the infant provides significant protection when mothers have received less than 4 weeks of antepartum prophylaxis. For mothers on ART, infant prophylaxis for the first 6 weeks of life provides added early postpartum protection, especially for mothers who start ART late, have less than optimal adherence or have not achieved full viral suppression.*

## 8.2 ARV prophylaxis for all HIV-infected pregnant women who do not need treatment for their own health

### RECOMMENDATION 5

All HIV-infected pregnant women who are not in need of ART for their own health require an effective ARV prophylaxis strategy to prevent HIV transmission to the infant. ARV prophylaxis should be started from as early as 14 weeks gestation (second trimester) or as soon as possible when women present late in pregnancy, in labour or at delivery.

(*Strong recommendation, low quality of evidence*)

*Remarks: Despite the lack of direct evidence showing that starting prophylaxis earlier (than 28 weeks) is associated with lower rates of intrauterine transmission, the panel placed a high value on reducing the potential lost to follow-up and delayed start of prophylaxis by waiting until the third trimester, and recognized that there is some risk of intrauterine transmission throughout pregnancy. Available observational studies show the benefits of the early start of prophylaxis. This will minimize delays between HIV testing in pregnancy and ARV prophylaxis initiation. Given the median time of 1st antenatal visit in most settings, most women would not start ARV prophylaxis at 14 weeks, but the goal is for a majority of women to start during the 2nd trimester, rather than the middle of the 3rd trimester.*

## RECOMMENDATION 6

For all HIV-infected pregnant women who are not in need of ART for their own health, ARV prophylaxis option A consists of:

- antepartum daily AZT;
- sd-NVP at onset of labour<sup>‡</sup>;
- AZT + 3TC during labour and delivery<sup>‡</sup>;
- AZT + 3TC for 7 days postpartum<sup>‡</sup>.

(Strong recommendation, low quality of evidence)

<sup>‡</sup>sd-NVP and AZT+3TC intra- and post-partum can be omitted if mother receives more than 4 weeks of AZT during pregnancy

In breastfeeding infants, maternal ARV prophylaxis should be coupled with daily administration of NVP to the infant from birth until one week after all exposure to breast milk has ended.

(Strong recommendation, moderate quality of evidence)

In non-breastfeeding infants, maternal ARV prophylaxis should be coupled with daily administration of AZT or NVP from birth until 6 weeks of age.

(Conditional recommendation, low quality of evidence)

*Remarks: The maternal component of this ARV prophylaxis strategy is the same as the one recommended in the 2006 guidelines, although the revised recommendation is to start earlier during pregnancy (see Recommendation 5).*

*For breastfeeding infants, the panel placed a high value on an intervention that would allow safer breastfeeding practices in settings where breastfeeding is the norm. Although data are only available for the provision of NVP to infants up to 6 months of age, the panel felt there is a need to provide ARV prophylaxis throughout the breastfeeding period to minimize the risk of transmission. The panel also felt that these ARV guidelines should not recommend a target duration for breastfeeding; WHO will provide separate guidelines on HIV and infant feeding, in the context of ARVs.*

*As in Recommendation 4, for non-breastfeeding infants, there is no evidence assessing the efficacy of daily NVP for any duration beyond a single dose. However, there is high quality of evidence that 6 weeks of daily infant AZT prophylaxis in conjunction with maternal antepartum AZT prophylaxis for more than 4 weeks significantly prevents HIV MTCT. There is additional evidence that AZT for 6 weeks to the infant provides significant protection when mothers have received less than 4 weeks of antepartum prophylaxis. This conditional recommendation was primarily based on programmatic considerations that would facilitate its implementation in the field: countries should have the option of using NVP or AZT prophylaxis in infants; 6 weeks is also the first immunization visit and the target date for early diagnosis testing for HIV-exposed children in most settings, implying that most children will have an opportunity to be seen and re-evaluated at that age.*

## RECOMMENDATION 7

For all HIV-infected pregnant women who are not eligible for ART, ARV prophylaxis option B consists of triple ARV drugs provided to pregnant women starting from as early as 14 weeks of gestation until one week after all exposure to breast milk has ended. The recommended regimens include:

- AZT + 3TC + LPV/r\*
- AZT + 3TC + ABC
- AZT + 3TC + EFV
- TDF + 3TC (or FTC) + EFV

(Strong recommendation, moderate quality of evidence)

In breastfeeding infants, the maternal triple ARV prophylaxis should be coupled with the daily administration of NVP to the infant from birth until 6 weeks of age.

(Strong recommendation, low quality of evidence)

In non-breastfeeding infants, the maternal triple ARV prophylaxis should be coupled with the daily administration of AZT or NVP to the infant from birth until 6 weeks of age.

(Conditional recommendation, very low quality of evidence)

*Remarks: The provision of maternal triple ARV prophylaxis during pregnancy in women who are not eligible for ART results in very low intrauterine and peripartum transmission rates. A high value is also placed on the simplicity of the intervention as it contains only one maternal and one infant regimen and may be available as a single daily fixed-dose combination.*

*For breastfeeding infants, available data suggest that maternal triple ARV prophylaxis started in pregnancy and continued during breastfeeding is efficacious in reducing HIV transmission and infant death. The panel placed a high value on providing an intervention that would allow safer breastfeeding practices for as long as the child is exposed to breast milk.*

*For non-breastfeeding infants, the conditional recommendation was primarily based on programmatic issues that would facilitate its implementation in the field: 6 weeks is the first immunization visit and the target date for early diagnosis testing for HIV-exposed children in most settings, implying that most children will have an opportunity to be seen and re-evaluated at that age.*

\* LPV/r: lopinavir/ritonavir; ABC: abacavir

Table 2 summarizes the two recommended ARV prophylaxis options for HIV-infected pregnant women who are not eligible for ART:

- **Option A: Maternal AZT**
- **Option B: Maternal triple ARV prophylaxis**

There is a strong benefit of providing effective and sustained prophylaxis to women not eligible for ART during pregnancy, labour and delivery, as well as throughout breastfeeding in settings where breastfeeding is the preferred practice. Both recommended options A and B provide significant reduction of the MTCT risk. There are advantages and disadvantages of both options, in terms of feasibility, acceptability and safety for mothers and infants, as well as cost. The choice for a preferred option should be made at a country level, after considering these advantages and disadvantages.

TABLE 2. ARV-prophylaxis options recommended for HIV-infected pregnant women who do not need treatment for their own health

| Option A: Maternal AZT  | Option B: Maternal triple ARV prophylaxis   |
|---|---|
| <b>MOTHER</b>   | <b>MOTHER</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Antepartum AZT (from as early as 14 weeks gestation)</li> <li>• sd-NVP at onset of labour*</li> <li>• AZT + 3TC during labour and delivery*</li> <li>• AZT + 3TC for 7 days postpartum*</li> </ul> <p>* sd-NVP and AZT+3TC can be omitted if mother receives &gt;4 weeks of AZT antepartum</p> | Triple ARV from 14 weeks until one week after all exposure to breast milk has ended <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• AZT + 3TC + LPV/r</li> <li>• AZT + 3TC + ABC</li> <li>• AZT + 3TC + EFV</li> <li>• TDF + 3TC (or FTC) + EFV</li> </ul> |
| <b>INFANT</b>   | <b>INFANT</b>   |
| <p><i>Breastfeeding infant</i><br/>Daily NVP from birth until one week after all exposure to breast milk has ended</p> <p><i>Non-breastfeeding infant</i><br/>AZT or NVP for 6 weeks</p>  | <p><i>Breastfeeding infant</i><br/>Daily NVP from birth to 6 weeks</p> <p><i>Non-breastfeeding infant</i><br/>AZT or NVP for 6 weeks</p>  |

# 9. Annex 1

## **WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION**

### **Guidelines committee review meeting on the use of antiretroviral drugs for treating pregnant women and preventing HIV infection in infants - 2009 version**

Château de Penthes, Geneva, Switzerland, 19-21 October 2009

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