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PEDIATRIC AIDS FOUNDATION

November 2009
Vol. 1 | Issue 2

Haba Na Haba

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Spotlight On…

Infant and Young Child Feeding in the Context of HIV

Photo courtesy of Elena Ghanotakis

The finding that HIV can be transmitted via breast milk has created major challenges for HIV prevention programs in resource-limited settings. On the one hand, breast milk is the ideal food for infants as it contains all the nutrition and immunologic properties they need. On the other hand, in the case of an HIV-positive mother, breast milk carries HIV and can transmit the virus to the infant. In fact, up to 40% of vertical transmissions of HIV can be attributed to breastfeeding in the absence of any intervention to prevent mother-to-child HIV transmission.[1] Although preventing vertical transmission of HIV during pregnancy and childbirth is of the utmost importance—an area where the Foundation devotes much of its efforts—responsibility does not end when the infant is born. To achieve the Foundation's mission of eradicating pediatric AIDS, all programs must strive to ensure that infants who are uninfected at birth remain uninfected, and that infants with HIV survive and grow into healthy children. Promoting and supporting optimal infant and young child feeding (IYCF) practices is necessary to achieve this goal.

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