



test & treat
to end aids

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NIH Study Paves Path for Eliminating HIV/AIDS
'Test and Treat' Organization Urges Aggressive Treatment
When Infections Are Found

DENVER – The National Institutes of Health’s groundbreaking HIV/AIDS study sets the stage for testing an aggressive treatment approach that could finally end the 30-year-old pandemic, says a Denver-based organization.

Test & Treat to End AIDS (TTEA), which advocates immediate drug treatment for all people diagnosed with HIV, lauded the NIH study and urged governments and AIDS organizations worldwide to take a fresh look at the “Test and Treat” approach.

The NIH’s \$73 million study (HPTN 052) found that HIV-positive people were 96 percent less likely to infect their sexual partners if they were treated soon after diagnosis with antiretroviral drugs. TTEA proposes a phased “operational” study of its strategy in which all people, after testing positive for HIV, would receive immediate drug treatment. The study would evaluate whether or not the “Test and Treat” strategy can be scaled up in an economic manner to finally eliminate HIV/AIDS. If successful this would be the first step towards making “Test and Treat” public health policy worldwide. TTEA has been advocating for funding a large-scale study of its strategy since forming a year ago.

The NIH study has got to be the death knell for ‘business as usual’ in HIV/AIDS treatment & prevention,” says Victor Dukay, Ph.D., president of Denver’s Lundy Foundation and a partner in TTEA. “As we in TTEA have been saying for over a year, the current practice of waiting to treat HIV until the infection advances does not control and or eliminate the pandemic.”

More than two and a half million new HIV infections are reported around the world each year despite decades of efforts to control the disease through behavioral modification and prevention. No cure or vaccine exists, but drugs can extend and improve the quality of life.

TTEA has cited numerous earlier studies that indicated that using antiretroviral drugs earlier than called for in traditional treatment protocols could reduce and potentially eliminate HIV transmission. “Test and Treat” is gaining acceptance; several communities and countries are or will use the strategy, at least in part.

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The NIH study is a milestone because it enrolled 1,763 couples in nine countries and used a “single-blind” approach in which half of infected participants received drugs immediately and in the other half, treatment was delayed until they met the eligibility criteria for treatment according to the latest WHO guidelines.

“Now is the time to investigate whether immediate treatment – the ‘Test and Treat’ strategy – can be scaled up,” says Dukay. A bigger community-based study can determine whether people will voluntarily be tested for HIV; whether HIV-positive people will go into and remain on treatment; and whether communities can provide necessary support for a large-scale “Test and Treat” strategy, he says.

Because HIV-fighting drugs are expensive in terms of an individual’s relative income – there are financial concerns about expanding the numbers being treated.

However, Brian Williams, Ph.D., a TTEA senior partner who recently retired from the World Health Organization, has shown that “Test and Treat” can save money over time and provide donors an “exit strategy” from having to continually fund HIV. It could save lives and taxpayer money. He co-authored a mathematical look at the strategy in 2008. Published in the online edition of the British medical journal, *The Lancet*, the paper found that if immediate treatment were used in South Africa, particularly hard hit by HIV/AIDS, incidence would significantly drop in a relatively short period of time.

“Although upfront costs are higher in ‘Test and Treat’ because more people are receiving drugs, costs drop later as those infected live out their lives on treatment and there are significantly fewer new cases,” Williams says. If TTEA’s strategy were used throughout South Africa, the study noted, \$11 billion and 3.9 million lives would be saved in the coming decades.

”We must also remember the suffering that HIV/AIDS exacts – on its people living with the disease, their loved ones and the communities that they live in,” Williams adds. “Test and Treat is our best hope to stop the spiral of infection and death that has devastated so many communities and families around the globe.”

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About Test & Treat to End AIDS: TTEA is an international group of scientists, doctors and evaluation experts advocating for the funding of a new, aggressive approach to end the HIV/AIDS pandemic. For more information, visit www.ttea.info

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