

Antenatal HIV screening in Europe: a review of policies.

Abstract:

The increased prevalence of HIV infection in women is leading to a rising number of children born to HIV-infected mothers. As therapeutic possibilities for HIV/AIDS increase, the detection of undiagnosed HIV infections in pregnant women, followed by adequate management, is of crucial interest. Therapeutic protocols are being updated and increasingly applied in most European countries, but there is no structured information on policies and strategies with regard to antenatal HIV screening as such. **METHODS:** In order to identify national policies with regard to antenatal HIV screening, a structured questionnaire was sent to key-informants within the ministries of health and national institutes for public health in each of the 25 EU Member States. **RESULTS:** Information was obtained from all EU Member States with the exception of Cyprus and Luxembourg. Eighteen countries issued a national policy with regard to antenatal HIV screening, 16 opted for a system in which HIV testing is offered to all women attending antenatal services while only two opted for selective screening. None of the 18 countries with a national policy supports a mandatory screening strategy. The voluntary testing strategies are of two types: opting in versus opting out. In almost all EU countries with antenatal HIV screening policies, screening conditions are defined. **CONCLUSION:** Policies are in place in most EU countries. Nevertheless, there is a need for more integrated European policies and region-specific recommendations on the performance of antenatal HIV screening as an opportunity for comprehensive HIV/AIDS service delivery. This would enable the different aspects of prevention to be linked and also address both the needs of pregnant women and mothers as well as that of their infants.