

HIV-positive Women in Ontario Want Children

TORONTO (Dec. 4, 2009) – New research shows that 69 per cent of HIV-positive women in their reproductive years in Ontario want to give birth, and 57 per cent intend to do so.

A cross-sectional study, to be published in the Monday, Dec. 7 issue of PLoS ONE, asked HIV-positive women of reproductive age (18-52) living in Ontario about their fertility desires, intentions and actions.

“The proportion of respondents intending pregnancy was higher than previous North American studies,” says Dr. Mona Loutfy, principal investigator and scientist at the Women’s College Research Institute. “Our results demonstrate that we need more services and better support for HIV-positive women while they are planning their pregnancies, so they can have families in a safe and healthy way.”

Conducted by the Women’s College Research Institute at Women’s College Hospital in Toronto, the study recruited women from 38 sites in Ontario to complete a survey entitled The HIV Pregnancy Planning Questionnaire between October 2007 and April 2009. The goal was to assess their desire to get pregnant and their intention to do so.

The study found that the proportion of HIV-positive women living in Ontario intending pregnancy was similar to results of studies from African populations, rather than previous North American reports. This indicates to researchers that improving services in areas with high levels of African immigration is particularly important.

“Sixty-eight thousand Canadians are infected with HIV and 20 per cent of them are women. Eighty per cent of these women are in their reproductive years,” adds Dr. Loutfy. Being infected with HIV shouldn’t stop people from planning to get pregnant and having families. With support and proper planning, women with HIV can lead healthy, productive lives and have healthy families. That’s why we are currently creating provincial and national pregnancy planning guidelines for individuals with HIV, and we are encouraged to see from this study just how many women in Ontario will benefit from their development.”

The guidelines will be available in early 2010 and have been accepted for consideration of endorsement by the Canadian Fertility and Andrology Society, the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada, the Canadian Infectious Disease Society and the Association of Medical Microbiology and Infectious Disease (AMMI Canada).

This study was supported by funding from the Canadian Foundation for AIDS Research and the AIDS Bureau, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care.

About Women’s College Research Institute

Women's College Hospital has established Canada's largest research institute dedicated solely to generating knowledge about women's health. Called the Women's College Research Institute (WCRI), it is leading the charge in breakthrough research and charting the path globally in new developments.

Over the past decade, WCRI's work has had a substantial impact worldwide. Breech births are safer because of its research. Women's College Hospital is a world leader in understanding the genetics of breast and ovarian cancers. And it is now possible to identify the potential for osteoporosis in young women.

Today, as Canada's only facility that tests women's health-care innovations within an ambulatory care community, WCRI continues to break new ground as it focuses on key areas of women's health and sex- and gender-based medicine: women and violence, mental health, genetics and cancer, obstetrics, osteoporosis, diabetes, and HIV/AIDS.

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