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PRESS RELEASE OF THE PopART STUDY

PopART Researchers Find ‘Universal Test and Treat’ Reduces New HIV Infections by 30%

The PopART study also called HPTN 071 was a multinational study in 21 urban communities of Zambia and South Africa. The aim of this study was to evaluate the impact of Universal test and treat for HIV on new infection.

This study is relevant to Zambia as there has been a policy shift in the approach to HIV. The burden of HIV remains huge, the current prevalence of HIV stands at 12%. Further it is estimated that Zambia records 47000 new infections every year.

There are nearly 2 million new HIV infections annually globally, with an estimated 800,000 occurring in eastern and southern Africa. There is an urgent need for more effective HIV prevention strategies to significantly reduce the number of new HIV infections. Zambia aim to attain epidemic control by 2020 i.e. reducing new infections annually to less than 5000.

Researchers today presented results from the [HPTN 071 \(PopART\) study](#) at the annual Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI) in Seattle. HPTN 071 (PopART) was a study that examined the impact of a package of HIV prevention interventions, including universal HIV testing and treatment (UTT) on community-level HIV incidence in 21 urban communities in Zambia and South Africa. Findings from HPTN 071 (PopART) study show delivery of an HIV prevention strategy that includes offering HIV testing to everyone, with immediate referral to HIV care, and treatment for people living with HIV based on prevailing in-country guidelines, can substantially reduce new HIV infections.

“This study was the largest HIV prevention trial ever undertaken involving a population of about one million people,” said Helen Ayles, MBBS, PhD, Zambart’s Director of Research, HPTN 071 (PopART) study primary investigator Zambia and Professor of Infectious Diseases and International Health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. “We set out to demonstrate whether whole communities would “buy in” to repeated HIV testing and link to services for both HIV care and prevention, and if they did whether this would reduce new infections in those communities.”

The HPTN 071 (PopART) study was conducted in 12 communities in Zambia and 9 in the Western Cape province of South Africa. The research team was led by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine overall with Zambart leading the study in Zambia. The study measured the effects of two HIV combination prevention strategies offering HIV testing to people in their homes annually, with linkage to HIV care and treatment at the local health facility for those living with HIV.

‘This study shows that Universal Test and Treat’ Reduces New HIV Infections by 30%.

These results provide further evidence that Zambia is on the right track in implementing universal HIV test and treat “. Zambia started providing universal HIV treatment in 2016 but the challenge is how to ensure that everybody knows their HIV status and links into care” said Dr Kennedy Malama, Permanent Secretary for Technical Services at the Ministry Of Health.

HPTN 071 (PopART) researchers are currently examining the effects of the interventions on other study outcomes including herpes simplex virus-2 incidence, Tuberculosis, HIV-related stigma and ART drug resistance. Work is also in progress to estimate the cost-effectiveness of the interventions.

“This study was an amazing example of research teams working closely with implementing partners (CIDRZ and ZPCTII) as well as the Ministry of Health” said Dr Kwame Shanaube, Deputy Director of Research, Zambart and the study lead “PopART has shown us what coverage of testing it is possible to achieve as well as identifying the gaps in coverage; especially for men and young people. We need to work harder, with these groups to ensure our services reach everyone”

The study took place between 2013 and 2018. At the beginning of the trial, national guidelines in Zambia specified that people living with HIV should start ART when their CD4+ T cell count (a measure of immune health) fell to 350 cells per milliliter. That was raised to 500 cells/ml in 2014. In 2016, the national guidelines changed and it was recommended that everyone diagnosed with HIV begin ART immediately, regardless of their CD4+ cell count.

Overall the research team was led by Richard Hayes, PhD from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and Sarah Fidler, MD, PhD from Imperial College London. The research team in Zambia was led by Helen Ayles, MBBS, PhD from Zambart. The research team in South Africa was led by Nulda Beyers, MD, PhD, and Peter Bock, MD, PhD, MPH at the Desmond Tutu TB centre at Stellenbosch University.

“The study team is deeply grateful to the people in Zambia who participated in the study, implementing and community partners, research teams, the Ministry of Health, staff at clinic level and to the study funders and sponsor, without whom this research would not have been possible,” said Prof. Ayles

The HPTN 071 (PopART) study was sponsored by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) with funding from the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Additional funding was provided by the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, as well as by NIAID, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), all part of NIH.

For more information about HPTN 071, visit hptn.org, or ClinicalTrials.gov using study identifier [NCT01900977](https://clinicaltrials.gov/ct2/show/study/NCT01900977)

About HPTN

The HIV Prevention Trials Network (HPTN) is a worldwide collaborative clinical trials network that brings together investigators, ethicists, community members and other partners to develop and test the safety and efficacy of interventions designed to prevent the acquisition and transmission of HIV. NIAID, NIMH and NIDA co-fund the HPTN. The HPTN has collaborated with more than 85 clinical research sites in 19 countries to evaluate new HIV prevention interventions and strategies in populations that bear a disproportionate burden of infection. The HPTN research agenda – more than 50 trials ongoing or completed with over 161,000 participants enrolled and evaluated – is focused primarily on the use of integrated strategies: use of antiretroviral drugs (antiretroviral therapy and pre-exposure prophylaxis); interventions for substance abuse, particularly injection drug use; behavioral risk reduction interventions and structural interventions.

For more information, visit hptn.org

About Zambart

Zambart is a Zambian research institution, whose mission is to conduct quality inter disciplinary health research on issues of public health importance in Zambia and contribute to improving health policy and practice leading to better health for all. Zambart has been conducting research in Zambia for over 20 years and has collaborated with researchers and research institutions in Zambia and around the globe.

For more information, visit www.zambart.org.zm