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Breakthrough in fight against AIDS

THREE babies have been declared HIV-free after being treated with a revolutionary new drug only hours after they were born. The fourth child only has “a very low level” of the virus after receiving the same treatment.

The findings, to be announced at the AIDS 2014 conference in Melbourne from July 20, are a major breakthrough in the fight against AIDS, with scientists hoping it could lead to a cure if treatment is received early enough.

It’s not yet known how old the babies are now but more is expected to be released when 14,000 delegates from nearly 200 countries descend on Melbourne to share their research and the latest scientific advances in the field.

AIDS 2014 co-chairman, Professor Sharon Lewin, told the *Daily Mail Australia* that despite some people labelling the results as a “cure”, it cannot yet be officially classed as one.

“At the moment, the doctors do not know whether they are in fact cured. The only way they can tell is if they stop the anti-HIV drugs and see if it comes back,” Lewin said.

“We are excited about this though because all four received very early treatment after delivery and when doctors tried to locate the virus, they could find virtually no viruses in their systems.

“These baby cases and more cases among adults tell us that if we treat HIV very early in some people were able to stop it. And in some people, maybe only 10 per cent or so who start treatment very early, it might even be safe for them to stop taking their drugs and

their virus stays under control. However, this is still a research question that needs to be addressed.

“However, you must keep in mind that the best way to stop babies getting HIV is to treat the mother during pregnancy,” she added.

ANTIRETROVIRAL DRUGS

After contracting the virus from their mothers, the four Canadian-born children were given a high dose of three different antiretroviral drugs.

News of the four babies and their success stories comes only a year after the very first child to ever be “cured” of HIV was officially announced. The baby, born in Mississippi in 2010, and was cleared of any infection in 2013.

The mother of the child only found out that she was infected with HIV during labour and was not able to take precautionary action which could help her unborn child avoid infection. According to the University of Mississippi, Dr Hannah Gay, associate professor of paediatrics and an HIV specialist, gave the baby a three-drug antiretroviral therapeutic prescription. Treatment began when she was only 30 hours old — despite not having confirmation that the baby was infected at the time.

Only 29 days later, the virus could not be found in the infant’s system and did not return after the child stopped taking her prescription. However, the four Canadian children are yet to stop taking their treatment and doctors are unable to determine if the virus is likely to return if they do.

Daily Mail