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## Women lacking HIV care in Papua New Guinea

**SYDNEY:** Nearly 90 per cent of pregnant women who are HIV positive in Papua New Guinea fail to receive care to help prevent the virus infecting their unborn child, a leading expert said Wednesday.

Dr Mobuma Kiromat, clinical director of the Clinton Health Access Initiative programme countering parent to child transmission in the Pacific nation, said much had been done to fight the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Papua New Guinea.

But more work was needed, particularly to assist pregnant women.

"We still haven't got it right, the (health) coverage actually is still very low," she told AFP from Sydney where she spoke later yesterday at an event to mark World AIDS Day today.

Kiromat said about 2.3 per cent of pregnant women who had the HIV virus which causes AIDS had access to treatment to prevent the spread of the disease to their baby in 2007, and this figure had grown to 11.1 per cent in 2009.

"We would like that number to be above 50 per cent," she said.

"It needs a lot of work still; other

areas have gone ahead like adult treatment. But remember pregnant women are adults and many of them don't know their (HIV) status."

Impoverished Papua New Guinea was hard hit by the spread of the HIV virus but the situation has improved thanks to aid programmes and estimates of the infection among the population are about 0.9 per cent, Kiromat said.

But pregnant women were still vulnerable, with many pre-natal clinics unable to provide testing for the virus, she added.

Under a programme being rolled out across the nation, which treats women with anti-retroviral medication treatments from early in their pregnancy until after the baby is delivered, transmission of the virus to the child falls from about 30 per cent to 10 per cent, she said.

"You can never reduce it to zero because there are many factors along the way which determine giving the virus to your baby," she said, including other illness, poor nutrition and a low immunity.

There are about 390,000 cases of mother-to-child transmission of HIV around the globe each year and the issue is a focus of this year's World AIDS Day. — AFP