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Second US baby is HIV-free after early treatment

WASHINGTON: A baby treated for HIV within hours of birth is free of the virus nearly a year later, in the second case that has raised hopes about early treatment, doctors said Wednesday.

The approach mirrored that taken for a Mississippi baby, who has been off treatment for 21 months and still has no detectable virus in her system. The latest research on the two young girls was presented at the annual Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections (CROI) in Boston.

The newest case involves a Los Angeles baby who was born to a mother infected with HIV and who had not been taking her medications, making her at high risk for transmission, said Yvonne Bryson, chief of pediatric infectious diseases at the David Geffen School of Medicine at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Audra Deveikis, a pediatric infectious disease specialist at Miller Children's Hospital Long Beach, where the baby was born, tested the infant and gave her high, treatment-level doses of antiretroviral drugs before even knowing if she was HIV-positive, Bryson told AFP by phone from the conference.

"The way it works is you test and you treat before you know the results because it takes several days to get the results," explained Bryson, a consultant on the case.

Treatment started at four hours of age, even earlier than the Mississippi child.

Eventually, the tests came back positive for HIV. But by six days of age, the virus was undetectable.

"The remarkable thing about this particular baby is that the virus disappeared so quickly," said Bryson.

The baby is still being treated with antiretroviral drugs, and researchers are cautious not to utter the word "cure" or even "remission" just yet.

Now aged 11 months, the child

is doing well and continues to see doctors while under the care of a foster family.

She has "no detectable viral load, nothing since six days of age. That is the earliest ever," said Bryson.

Once she turns two, doctors may decide to stop suppressive therapy to see if she is in remission, or if the virus would rebound.

"The only way we would know if the baby is in remission is to stop therapy," explained Bryson.

Also at the conference, Deborah Persaud of Johns Hopkins University presented the latest on the Mississippi baby, who was given ART at 31 hours of age.

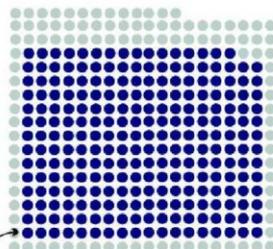
Now, the three-year-old is considered in remission from HIV, after drug treatment was stopped 21 months ago and no viral rebound has been observed. Bryson said the Los Angeles team is optimistic that their baby will do just as well.

"The fact that it was a very fast reduction in the virus to undetectable levels makes us very hopeful that this baby might follow in the footsteps of the Mississippi which is still being followed," said Bryson. - AFP

Living with HIV

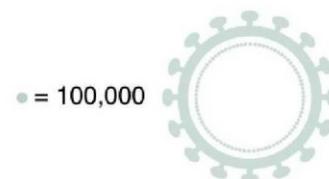
In 2012

Total
35.3 million people living with HIV



Of which **25 million** are in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)

2.3 million new infections



3.3 million children* living with HIV



1.6 million total AIDS deaths



210,000 children* died of AIDS



*Under 15

Source: UNAIDS **AFP**