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## Early antibiotic use slashes HIV death toll

**PARIS:** Preventive use of a cheap, commonly-prescribed antibiotic dramatically reduced the death toll among African patients whose immune systems had been ravaged by the AIDS virus, said a paper.

The drug, co-trimoxazole, marketed as Septrim, Bactrim and other brands, is widely used to combat pneumonia and ear and urinary tract infections and has also been found to have some antimalarial properties.

The investigation covered 3,179 people in Uganda and Zimbabwe who were started on a course of antiretroviral therapy and whose counts of CD4 immune cells were lower than 200 cells per microlitre.

Among those given co-trimoxazole alongside the anti-HIV drugs, the risk of dying during the first three months fell by 59% compared to those who were not on the antibiotic.

At the 72-week stage, the reduced risk of mortality still persisted, but it evened out to 35% overall.

In addition, co-trimoxazole cut frequency of malaria by 26%.

These benefits, together with the very low side effects, suggest doctors in Africa should also prescribe co-trimoxazole at the early stage of treatment for HIV, says the paper, published online by *The Lancet*. — AFP