Is HIV Outbreak Among Children in Larkana over? Findings From a Large Test and Treat Initiative

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BACKGROUND

An outbreak of HIV among children was reported in Ratodero (district Larkana, Sindh province, Pakistan) in April 2019. The main sources of transmission were nosocomial namely, unsafe injections and infusions in healthcare settings.

In 2022, routine ART registration data suggested ongoing community transmission with more adults being diagnosed than children, but positivity rates were unclear given the lack of testing data. We present the results of a community-based educate, test and treat initiative in Ratodero to understand the status of outbreak nearly five years after it was first reported.

METHODS

Door-to-door testing was done in partnership with CDC Sindh and local administration which focused on selected union councils (UCs) of Ratodero (370000 population), the epicentre of 2019 outbreak. Those aged 18 months to 60 years were eligible, while those who self-reported HIV test in the past 6 months or were already on ART were excluded.

Thirty mobile teams of one trained male and female mobilizer each offered a single rapid HIV test (Abbott Early Detect) from house to house in pre-defined geographic areas. Those with a reactive result were referred to Ratodero ART centre for confirmation and ART initiation.

Children continue to be at ongoing risk of HIV acquisition due to unsafe injection practices warranting urgent action.

Figure 1. Linkage and treatment results

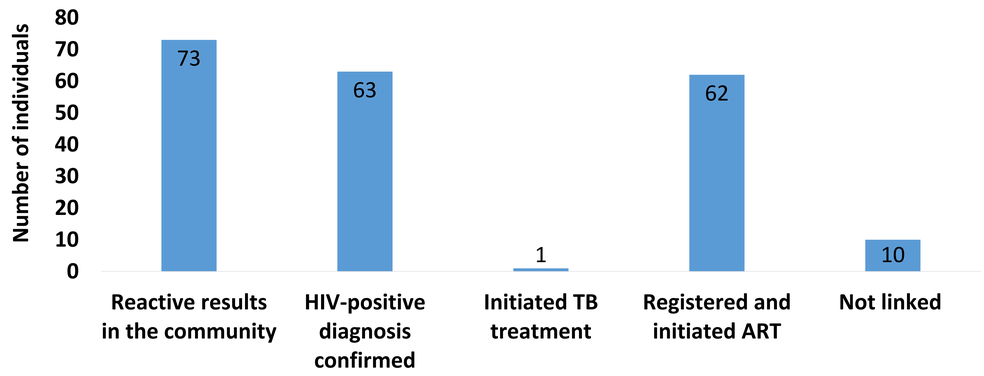

Figure 2. Likely source of HIV transmission among those linked with ART (n=63)

RESULTS

Between September 6 and 21, 2023, 43877 HIV tests were performed (47% among children aged 18 months-14 years; 58% among females). Overall, 73 (0.17%) individuals had a reactive HIV result (male: 0.18%, female: 0.15%). Two-thirds (n=48) of all reactive results were among children. The reactive rate among children (0.23%) was higher than those 15 years and above (0.11%). The reactive rate varied by UC, ranging from 0% to 0.29%. Of those with reactive results, 63 (86%) were linked to ART centre as of February 14, 2024 (Figure 1).

The mode of transmission for 48 individuals (76%) was reported as reuse of contaminated needles or syringes (Figure 2).

CONCLUSIONS

HIV positivity was comparable to national HIV prevalence (0.2%) suggesting low level community transmission.

Children continue to be at a greater risk of acquiring HIV and reuse of contaminated needles and syringes continue to drive the transmission in this setting.

Urgent action is needed to address unsafe injection practices to stop the transmission.

ADDITIONAL KEY INFORMATION

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Acknowledgements: All the field staff who participated in testing and linkage and communities that participated in the initiative.