

Helping Prevent Pediatric HIV/AIDS in Central Asia

Located in Karaganda Oblast, Termirtau is a focal point of Kazakhstan's HIV/AIDS epidemic. Women in their reproductive years there now account for more than 35 percent of all new HIV infections, making a comprehensive strategy for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) of HIV more urgent than ever before.

Termirtau is a pilot site for replication in Kazakhstan of AIHA's highly successful PMTCT program first launched in 2000 in Odessa, Ukraine. With funding from USAID, experts from Odessa worked closely with their colleagues from Karaganda Oblast AIDS Center and the Municipal Maternity Hospital to enhance the knowledge and skills of the Kazakh practitioners and develop a core faculty capable of training others to prevent vertical transmission of HIV. As a result of this collaboration, a regional PMTCT Training Center was opened in early 2006 at the Maternity Hospital.

The PMTCT Training Center plays a critical role in Kazakhstan's efforts to stem the spread of HIV by educating clinicians about the virus, prevention methods, and the importance of voluntary counseling and testing, particularly among pregnant women and those of reproductive age. This in turn, helps reduce late detection of HIV infection among pregnant women and new cases of pediatric HIV - both significant problems in Kazakhstan, according to Olga Orlova, a pediatrician at the Karaganda Oblast AIDS Center.

Relying on the skill and experience of local specialists, this training center is helping build capacity among healthcare professionals in Kazakhstan and other nations in Central Asia to prevent vertical transmission of HIV. Training includes instruction in the WHO/CDC PMTCT Generic Training Package, which was adapted by AIHA to reflect national policies, country-specific epidemiological data on HIV/AIDS, and Kazakhstan's national protocols on HIV prevention, care, and treatment.

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**— Natalya Petrova,
Assistant Professor of
Infectious Diseases,
Almaty Postgraduate
Medical Institute**

During its first months in operation, the PMTCT Training Center in Termirtau hosted four training courses for senior faculty from medical schools throughout Kazakhstan, as well as for obstetrician/gynecologists from maternity hospitals and specialists from primary healthcare institutions in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, according to Natalya Petrova, assistant professor of infectious diseases at the Almaty Postgraduate Medical Institute and one of Kazakhstan's leading experts on HIV/AIDS. "Thanks to this program, we train more practitioners in HIV/AIDS prevention and treatment each month," Petrova says.