SURVEILLANCE CARRIED OUT IN SIX PROVINCES SHOWS THAT HIV SPREAD IN ANGOLA CAN BE CONTROLLED

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Luanda – Experts from WHO expressed their concern over the HIV epidemic in Angola, however, it was concluded that more sentinel sites and surveys, both on biomarkers and behaviours were needed to design the epidemiological trend of the disease in the country.

This statement was released when WHO, MoH and the Italian Government presented results of the first phase of HIV, STI’s and VCT studies conducted by the WHO/Italian initiative.

Dr. Txema Calleja, WHO/HQ, stressed that efforts in surveillance are to be focused on the age group of 15-24 years, to better define the trend of the epidemic.

The initiative, implemented by MoH, with technical guidance from WHO and financial support from the Italian Government, has to date, provided for 11 studies and the organization of sentinel sites in six provinces of the country.

More than 100 technicians have been trained by this initiative. The results indicated better management of STIs in the provinces of Luanda, Malanje, Benguela, Huila, Lunda Norte and Cabinda.

Results of the last five sentinels sites in Luanda show that 4,5% of pregnant women were positive from HIV, 8,1% were infected by hepatitis B and 5,4% by syphilis. The HIV prevalence in the remaining provinces is distributed as follows: 3,2% in Benguela, 3,2% in Cabinda, 0,7% in Malanje, 1,5% in Lunda-Sul and 1,3% in Huila.

Additional data on the prevalence of syphilis and Hepatitis B imply that these two diseases need urgent attention by the National Authority. Primarily, to prevent congenital syphilis whilst considering the introduction of a universal vaccination for Hepatitis B in the near future.

Though the testing was carried out in pregnant women who, because of the low access to antenatal care might not entirely represent the general population, the results show that a window of opportunity is open in Angola to fight HIV/AIDS since the prevalence is the lowest in the region.
According to Dr. Paolo Balladelli, WHO representative, the partners in the initiative are playing a commendable role.

Dr. Balladelli stressed that without the support of MoH, and the Italian Government, the success of the initiative could not have been achieved. The collaboration of the implementing NGO’s such as GOAL, IPMP and PSI, in addition to the cooperation of UNAIDS, UNICEF and UNFPA are invaluable, as is the assistance and the coordination of the National Institute for Public Health and the National Programme against HIV/AIDS.

CDC/Atlanta also financed WHO for a survey on behaviour commencing next week in Luanda and Malange provinces. This component will be integrated to the biomarker investigation at the sentinel sites level.

For the second phase of this endeavour, the Vice-Minister of Health referred to the need of accelerating the organization of HIV sites in the other provinces, beginning in provinces where the risk of a quick spread of the disease is higher. These provinces include Moxico, Kuando-Kubango, Uige, Zaire and Cunene. STIs case management will also be used as an entry to reinforce testing and counselling of the population on HIV/AIDS.