

Hormonal contraception and HIV: Communicating current WHO Guidance

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WHO GUIDELINES

- ❑ It is critically important that women and couples at risk of HIV infection be informed about and have access to male and female condoms, and other measures to prevent and reduce their risk of HIV infection and sexually transmitted infections (STIs), regardless of which form of contraception they choose.
- ❑ Hormonal contraceptives, including COCs, CICs, POPs, POIs, progestogen-only implants, and LNG-IUDs do not protect against STIs/HIV.
- ❑ Women at high risk of acquiring HIV can use the following hormonal contraceptive methods without restriction: combined oral contraceptive pills (COCs), combined injectable contraceptives (CICs), contraceptive patches and rings, progestogen-only pills (POPs), progestogen-only injectables (DMPA and NET-EN), and levonorgestrel (LNG) and etonogestrel (ETG) implants.

WHO GUIDELINES: POI MEC CATEGORY 1*

- ❑ Available studies on the association between POI contraception and HIV acquisition have important methodological limitations hindering interpretation. Some studies suggest that women using POI contraception may be at increased risk of HIV acquisition; other studies have not found this association.
- ❑ The public health impact of any such association would depend upon the local context, including rates of injectable contraceptive use, maternal mortality and HIV prevalence. This must be considered when adapting guidelines to local contexts.
- ❑ Given the importance of this issue, women at high risk of HIV infection should be informed that POIs may or may not increase their risk of HIV acquisition.
- ❑ Women and couple at high risk of HIV acquisition considering POIs should also be informed about and have access to HIV preventive measures, including male and female condoms

CHALLENGES

- ❑ The MEC is a guideline for guidelines
- ❑ Uncertainty difficult to communicate
- ❑ HIV is a very emotive issue
- ❑ We know dual contraception is uncommon
- ❑ Communication skills of health workers often need to be strengthened
- ❑ Important that communication strategies are integrated

HIGHLIGHTS FROM WHO MEETING ON HC AND HIV

- ❑ Support for development strong communication strategies
- ❑ Messaging is critical
 - We must provide clear messaging even when acknowledging that evidence remains ambiguous.
 - We must think about and be prepared to respond to the implications of our messages.
 - Systematic approach to address what happens when messaging and programming around uncertainty is rolled out.
- ❑ Important to articulate and understand what happens when you develop and implement additional communication guidance (beyond MEC)
- ❑ Importance of the media and messages to other audiences
- ❑ Consequences of inaction