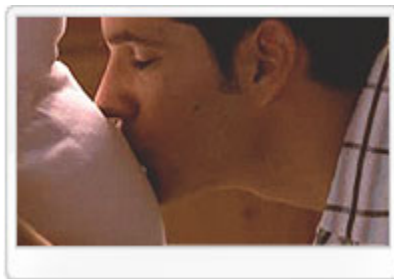


Andrea's story – the human face of the epidemic in Ecuador

“I want my baby to be born free from HIV”



When Andrea, 20, discovered that her husband had HIV, she immediately got tested. Already five months pregnant, she discovered that she was HIV-positive. Andrea was frightened, but her mother stayed by her side throughout the ordeal. “She was scared too, but she supported me immediately,” Andrea recalls.

There are many women like Andrea who run the risk of transmitting HIV to their children. About 8,000 people living with AIDS have been registered in Ecuador, with women increasingly among those infected.

In response, UNICEF-supported public service announcements (PSAs) on radio and television are now advising pregnant women in Ecuador to take a free, voluntary HIV test. The PSAs stress that with timely testing and treatment, mothers can prevent transmission of HIV to their children. Broadcasters throughout Ecuador are airing the PSAs, which were donated by an advertising agency and UNICEF partner Norlop JWT. The PSAs are part of the Ministry of Health's Campaign for the Prevention of Vertical Transmission of HIV, which encourages free, confidential HIV testing and counselling. The initiative has already raised HIV/AIDS awareness in Ecuador, where the average number of monthly HIV tests conducted on pregnant women nearly doubled by the end of 2006. At the end of 2007, around 500 pregnant women were living with HIV but only 213 were receiving ARVs (antiretrovirals) for PMTCT (prevention of mother-to-child transmission) – thereby reducing the number of Ecuadorian children likely to be born with HIV.

Since testing positive, Andrea has repeatedly returned to her doctor for medical check-ups. Soon, she will start another prophylaxis in an effort to ensure that her child is born free of HIV. Meanwhile, life goes on. Her husband is still working, and she wants to go to college. “I would like to go back to school,” she said. “But it's difficult because people discriminate against us, because they're not well informed. Now that I have HIV, I know one has to protect oneself,” Andrea added. “I simply want my child to be healthy, and that's why I want to receive all the available treatments.”