

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

A real life story from Ecuador

January 2007 – When Andrea, 20, discovered that her husband had HIV/AIDS, 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 cases of people living with HIV and AIDS have been registered in Ecuador, with women increasingly among those infected.

In response, UNICEF-supported public service announcements 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 advertising agency and UNICEF partner Norlop JWT. Testing, counselling, treatment The PSAs are part of the Campaign for the Prevention of Vertical Transmission of HIV/AIDS, which encourages free, confidential HIV testing and counselling.

The campaign was launched by the Ministry of Health with support from UNICEF and other partners. 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. As of October, 170 pregnant women had tested positive for HIV and 148 were undergoing treatment – thereby reducing the number of Ecuadorian children likely to be born with HIV.

Since testing positive, Andrea has repeatedly returned to her doctor for check-ups. Soon, she will start another treatment in an effort to see 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’m going through all the treatments.”