



MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Advanced **HIV** Disease (AHD) in Children



MINISTRY OF HEALTH





What is Advanced HIV Disease?

AHD means you could get certain illnesses that happen when someone's CD4 count is low. *All children living with HIV who are under five years old and have not been on ARVs for at least a year are considered to have AHD.*

Advanced HIV Disease is a serious condition in children because of their weak and still-developing immune systems; this means their bodies have a hard time fighting off infections. All HIV positive children under five years and not on ARVs for at least a year are considered to have AHD.

Key characteristics of a weak immune system in Advanced HIV Disease:

- **Low CD4 count:** The number of CD4 cells in the blood is significantly reduced.
- **Increased susceptibility to infections:** Children are more at risk of developing opportunistic infections, such as pneumonia, tuberculosis, and certain types of cancer.
- **Slowed growth and development:** The child may experience delays in physical and cognitive growth.
- **Poor weight gain:** Difficulty in gaining weight or unexplained weight loss.

Why is it more serious in children?

Children's bodies are still developing, so their immune systems aren't as strong as adults. This makes them more vulnerable to opportunistic infections



Major concerns of AHD in Children:

- **Rapid disease progression:** HIV can advance quickly in children, often leading to severe complications. Children with AHD are vulnerable to various infections, including pneumonia, diarrhea, tuberculosis, and severe bacterial infections.
- **Impaired growth and development:** AHD can slow down physical development in children and delay their ability to learn and understand. They might lose weight even if they're eating well, which may lead to severe acute malnutrition (SAM).
- **Increased death rate:** Children with AHD face a higher risk of death compared to adults with HIV.

Common Infections in Children with AHD:

While opportunistic infections in children can be the same as those in adults, there are some specific differences:

- **Pneumonia:** This is a common and often fatal infection in children with AHD.
- **Tuberculosis:** TB is a leading cause of death among children living with HIV and a serious threat.
- **Diarrhea:** Persistent diarrhea can lead to severe malnutrition and dehydration. It can last a long time and greatly increase their risk of death.
- **Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM):** SAM is a severe condition where a child is skinny and not growing properly due to a lack of food or the right kind of food.
- **Severe Bacterial Infections:** These can affect different organs of the body, including the lungs, mouth, nose, ect.



AHD Prevention & Treatment:

Additional measures for improving outcomes in children with AHD include:

- **Prevention of vertical transmission:** Reducing the risk of HIV transmission from mother to child during pregnancy, childbirth, and breastfeeding.
- **Early infant diagnosis:** Identifying HIV-infected infants as soon as possible to initiate treatment.
- **Nutrition support:** Providing adequate and appropriate nutrition to help children with AHD grow and develop.
- **Infection prevention and control:** Implementing measures to prevent the spread of infections.

This is important for managing Advanced HIV Disease and preventing life-threatening complications. Regular medical check-ups and screening for infections are essential for people living with HIV. Adherence to antiretroviral therapy (ART) is important in strengthening the immune system and reducing the risk of developing these infections.

For more information, visit the following websites:

<https://www.thriveinfo.org>

<https://www.afrocab.org>

Through the generous support of Unitaid, the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI)-led THRIVE Project is enabling access to critical prevention, screening, and treatment commodities for advanced HIV disease to dramatically reduce mortality among adults and children living with HIV. In partnership with CHAI through this project, AFROCB is leading community and civil society engagement in collaboration with global and local stakeholders.

All views expressed within these materials are AFROCB's own.