

Care-4-Families program combines full-service care, education and research to target HIV/AIDS



The Care-4-Families (C4F) program at Mattel Children's Hospital UCLA provides a single point of contact and comprehensive, family-focused services for HIV-infected newborns, children, adolescents, pregnant women and mothers and HIV-exposed infants. Part of the UCLA Division of Pediatric Infectious Diseases, the C4F program is a California Children's Services (CCS)-designated Infectious Diseases and Immunologic Disorders Center for treatment of HIV-infected and HIV-exposed children, and extends its full-service clinical care with access to clinical trials, psychosocial support and patient/family education.

Because the C4F program is one of only a handful of its kind in California, patients and families often travel long distances — up to 200 miles — to reach UCLA. C4F offers families in need assistance with case management, transportation and social work services through its partnership with the Los Angeles Family AIDS Network and as a recipient of Ryan White HIV/AIDS Program Part D funding from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Service Administration (HRSA).

UCLA advances global HIV/AIDS research in women and children

UCLA's Care-4-Families program is part of the International Maternal Pediatric Adolescent AIDS Clinical Trials group (IMPACT), formed in 2006 to bring together a global consortium of investigators, institutions and community representatives. IMPACT, which has been funded through 2021 by the National Institutes of Health, evaluates new therapies and prevention strategies for HIV in children of all ages and pregnant/postpartum women.

UCLA is one of three IMPACT sites in California and one of just 18 nationwide. UCLA researchers and their international colleagues are investigating whether HIV infection in babies can be arrested or even cured. Intensive treatment regimens have succeeded in restricting the infection in some cases.

Other high-priority research focuses on developing new antiretroviral treatments specific to children. "Of the close to 30 antiretroviral medications currently on the market, only a few have been tested in children and are available to the pediatric population," notes Jaime Deville, MD, Care-4-Families program director, NICHD/IMPACT site 5112 principal investigator, and professor of pediatrics. "We have a chance to change that."

Drawing on expertise from across the institution

Founded in 1987, C4F draws together a team of HIV specialists, including pediatric infectious disease physicians, high-risk obstetricians, specialists in adolescent medicine and psychiatry, an OB nurse practitioner, a pediatric nurse, a social worker and a dietitian. Clinic sessions are conducted in the outpatient UCLA Children's Health Center.

The long-standing program is strengthened through collaborations with the UCLA AIDS Institute and pediatric subspecialists in gastroenterology, neurodevelopment, nephrology, pulmonary disease, cardiology and dermatology, among other areas. UCLA's state-of-the-art immunology and virology laboratories enable rapid diagnosis and support physicians in treatment decisions.

U.S. HIV rates in children declining

Advances in treatment and prevention have significantly lowered infection rates for children in the United States. Fewer than 11,000 HIV-infected children under 13 years old were reported in 2009, compared with about 3.2 million children under 15 years old living with HIV worldwide. More than 90 percent of these infections come from mother-to-child transmission during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding. An HIV-positive mother who isn't treated for HIV during pregnancy or delivery has a 25 percent chance of passing the virus on to her baby.

The most effective method of prevention is maternal antiretroviral therapy (ART) initiated as early in the pregnancy as possible. The amount of virus present in the mother's blood, commonly called the viral load, is the most important factor for transmission of HIV from the mother to the infant.

UCLA: A major regional referral center

Mother-to-child transmission rates of HIV have been dramatically lowered among HIV-infected women in the U.S. who are appropriately treated for their disease and give birth in HIV-specialty-care settings. Each year, about 100 HIV-infected mothers deliver babies in Los Angeles County.

The last case of an HIV-positive baby born at UCLA took place in 2008. As a major referral center, the C4F Program sees newborns, children and teens sent from other area institutions, sometimes involving families who are engaged in international adoptions. Newborns exposed to HIV are tested multiple times from birth until 6 months of age. The program also addresses other significant issues that can impact HIV-infected children, such as learning disabilities, depression and growth disorders.

UCLA has a team of recognized world experts in the management and prevention of pediatric and perinatal HIV infection. Our physicians have led large-scale domestic and international HIV clinical trials that have changed HIV prevention and treatment guidelines worldwide.

C4F's many success stories include children diagnosed with HIV and treated at UCLA who are now healthy and have gone on to graduate from college, enjoy careers, get married and have children of their own.

Mattel Children's Hospital 

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