Brazil Becomes Most Populous Country to Eliminate Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV

Brazil credits the HIV milestone to its commitment to universal, free health care. How do perinatal transmissions in the U.S. compare?

December 24, 2025 By Laura Schmidt

Brazil is officially the most populous country in the Americas to be validated by the World Health Organization (WHO) for the elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, according to a WHO news release.

“Eliminating mother-to-child transmission of HIV is a major public health achievement for any country, especially for a country as large and complex as Brazil,” WHO director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, PhD, MSc, said in the release. “Brazil has shown that with sustained political commitment and equitable access to quality health services, every country can ensure that every child is born free of HIV and every mother receives the care she deserves.”

HIV can be transmitted from mother to child during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding. However, if the mother is in regular care and on HIV treatment, this risk is reduced to nearly zero. (HIV can be passed through these body fluids: blood, semen, pre-cum, rectal fluids, vaginal fluids and breast milk. To learn more, see the POZ Basics about HIV Transmission and Risk.)

Mother-to-child HIV transmission—also referred to as vertical transmission—affects millions worldwide. Thanks to Brazil’s long-standing commitment to universal and free access to health care services through its Unified Health System, the country met all criteria for EMTCT validation.

For example, Brazil reduced vertical transmission of HIV to below 2% and achieved over 95% coverage for prenatal care and provided routine HIV testing and timely treatment for its citizens who are pregnant and living with HIV.

Over the past decade, more than 500,000 pediatric HIV cases have been avoided in the Region of the Americas as a result of implementing Pan American Health Organization's (PAHO) Elimination Initiative to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HIV.

Related transmission data on PAHO doesn't include the United States. However, the United States does have a low rate of mother to child HIV transmission. According to data published in 2023, women with diagnosed HIV gave birth to 3,525 babies in 2019; of those, 32 babies acquired HIV perinatally. This results in 0.9 transmission per 100,000 annual births in the United States, or a rate of 0.9%.

The WHO press release offers more information on eliminating vertical transmission in other countries:

> Brazil is one of 19 countries and territories worldwide that have been validated by WHO for [eliminating mother-to-child transmission, EMTCT]. Twelve of these are in the Region of the Americas. In 2015, Cuba became the first country in the world to be validated for EMTCT of HIV and the elimination of congenital syphilis. Other countries in the Region include Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Bermuda, Cayman Islands, Montserrat, and Saint Kitts and Nevis in 2017; Dominica in 2020; Belize in 2023; and Jamaica and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines in 2024.
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> Outside the Americas, countries validated for EMTCT of HIV include Armenia, Belarus, Malaysia, Maldives, Oman, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.

Members of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) offered congratulations to Brazil for its milestone achievement, including UNAIDS executive director, Winnie Byanyima.

"I am delighted that Brazil has just been certified by WHO-PAHO for eliminating vertical transmission — the first country of more than 100 million people to do so," Byanyima said in a UNAIDS statement. "They did it by doing what we know works: prioritizing universal health care, tackling the social determinants that drive the epidemic, protecting human rights, and even when necessary breaking monopolies to secure access to medicines."

The Brazilian Minister of Health, Alexandra Padilha, said:

"Brazil is the largest country in the world to eliminate vertical transmission of HIV. The advances we celebrate reflect a collective, national, and global effort that has consolidated free access to antiretroviral therapy and modern prevention strategies in the country. Today the public health

system guarantees comprehensive care for people living with HIV and strives to expand access to even more efficient treatments."

In related news, the WHO recently validated the Maldives for eliminating mother-to-child transmission of hepatitis B, while maintaining its earlier validation (in 2019) for ending vertical transmissions of HIV and syphilis. This makes the Maldives the first country in the world to achieve "triple elimination."

"Maldives has shown that with strong political will and sustained investment in maternal and child health, elimination of mother-to-child transmission of these deadly diseases, and the suffering they bring, is possible," Ghebreyesus said in a release. "This historic milestone provides hope and inspiration for countries everywhere working towards the same goal."

To read more, click #HIV or #Mother-to-Child Transmission. There, you'll see headlines such as "Experts Urge Continued Hepatitis B Vaccine Birth Doses for Newborns," "WHO Issues First Guidance for Triple Elimination of Mother-to-Child Transmission of HIV, Syphilis and Hepatitis B" and "WHO Launches New Framework to Tackle HIV, Hepatitis and STI Drug Resistance."

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