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## HEALTH

# Lack of ARVs a risk to 10,000 children

Official admits there's a problem but disputes lobbyists' figure

By ODHIAMBO ORLALE

**U**p to 10,000 Kenyan children might die of HIV and Aids early due to lack of life-prolonging anti-retroviral drugs, the Government has admitted.

The director of Medical Services, Dr Francis Kimani, however, denied media reports quoting Human Rights Watch that 40,000 children would be affected.

Dr Kimani blamed the problem on lack of fixed drug combination of paediatric ARVs, making children use separate drugs in contrast to adults who have access to combined tablets; and the fact that only 80 per cent of women attending antenatal clinic accept HIV testing and had access to mother-to-child transmission of HIV services.

"Only 42 per cent of these mothers deliver in health institutions, which denies them an opportunity for interventions to prevent transmission," said Dr Kimani.

He maintained that 550,000 patients were receiving care for HIV at government and non-governmental facilities.

Dr Kimani said that only 230,000 of them, including 40,000 children, were on ARV therapy.

## 600

Number of health institutions providing free HIV testing for children

Said the DMS: "Out of that number, 30,000 children are currently receiving ARV in more than 350 facilities country wide."

The Government has put in place a national network for free testing of children at 600 health institutions.

Dr Kimani dismissed a 100-page report by Human Rights Watch, which stated that the Government's HIV

programme had failed to get life-prolonging drugs to the majority of children who needed them.

During the launch, Ms Julianne Kippenberg, a senior researcher on Africa in the Children's Rights Division of Human Rights Watch, regretted that the Government focused on getting treatment to adults and had neglected children living with HIV.

"The recent expansion of infant testing is a step in the right direction if carried out properly, but the Government needs to do much more to help children overcome treatment access barriers," Ms Kippenberg said while launching the report.

In the report, the organisation says despite anti-retrovirals being free in Kenya, two-thirds of children who urgently need them are not accessing the drugs.

The report warns that if untreated, half of all children born with HIV will die before their second birthdays, because many local health institutions do not ensure that children have access to HIV tests and rarely offer them anti-retroviral treatment.

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