HIV is a leading cause of death among women of reproductive age worldwide and significantly contributes to infant mortality. The four-pronged model for preventing mother to child transmission (PMTCT) developed by the UN in 2001 aims at reducing the risk from close to 40% to 5%. The strategy promotes disease prevention and provides treatment and support for affected women and their families.

One of the major successes in the management of HIV-positive patients is PMTCT. In the UK, MTCT was 25.6% among women diagnosed with HIV in 1993, but since interventions were made available, the rate of MTCT was reported as 1.2% during 2000-2006 among diagnosed women, with <0.1% among those with undetectable viral loads.

PMTCT requires that HIV-testing of women be made available with easy access to specialised services for antenatal care when HIV positive; intrapartum care must aim to minimise the risk of transmission to baby and postnatal care must provide continued treatment and support for both mother and baby in the community. Challenges are faced in initiating anti-retroviral therapy and reducing the lost-to-follow-up rates.