

# Antenatal HIV, syphilis and hepatitis B screening and positivity in selected sites in Vanuatu, 2024

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**Background:** Mother-to-child transmission (MTCT) is a major driver of HIV, syphilis and hepatitis B transmission and many Pacific Island Countries have a high, but unaddressed, burden of syphilis and hepatitis B. Global and regional strategies have set a target of 95% for screening during antenatal care (ANC) as an essential intervention to prevent MTCT. In Vanuatu, the Ministry of Health has recently implemented its decentralisation policy for ANC, through which ANC-based screening is being rolled out to nurses and midwives in community-based ANC services. This study collates and reports on ANC screening and positivity.

**Methods** This study is a nested cross-sectional study as part of a larger trial. Data were collected from three ANC clinics on Efate Island, SHEFA Province, participating in the 'Protektem Pikinini Blong Yu' trial. HIV, syphilis and hepatitis B testing and positivity data for women presenting for ANC were collected each week from patient registration books and entered into a custom web form. Data were collated and analysed to calculate screening and positivity rates.

**Results:** During the study period, a total of 949 pregnant women presented to a participating clinic for their first ANC visit. 534 women tested for HIV (56.3% screening rate) and no cases were detected. 721 pregnant women tested for syphilis (75.9% screening rate), among which 31 (4.3%) were positive. 721 pregnant women tested for hepatitis B (75.9% screening rate), among which 34 (4.7%) were positive.

**Conclusion:** In participating sites, three-quarters of pregnant women were screened for syphilis and hepatitis B, however efforts are required to reach the target of 95% screening coverage. The low HIV testing rate is concerning and urgent efforts are required to increase coverage. Positivity for syphilis and hepatitis B confirm high prevalence. These findings provide useful information to improve coverage of essential services to prevent MTCT in Vanuatu.