

Experts urge shift in HIV treatment at global meet in Canada

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AIDS researchers released a call to action Sunday for a worldwide shift in HIV treatment, to providing medication immediately after diagnosis instead of first watching for signs of illness to appear.

"Immediate antiretroviral (ARV) treatment more than doubles an individual's prospects of staying healthy and surviving," said the Vancouver Consensus, a statement signed by leading AIDS scientists and officials at the opening of the International AIDS Society (IAS) [conference](#), in this western Canadian city.

Scientists said new research to be presented at the conference shows immediate treatment prevents infected people from passing on the infection, while other reports showcase that preventive therapy "can effectively protect people at risk of infection through prophylactic use," said the statement, signed by heads of the International AIDS society, UNAIDS and funding agencies.

The last global AIDS meeting in Vancouver, in 1996, marked a breakthrough: research showing that triple-combination [antiretroviral treatment](#) worked. The findings meant that instead of an HIV diagnosis being an almost-certain death sentence, it became possible for an infected person to live a normal life while on treatment.

"Vancouver is going to make history again," said conference co-chair and researcher Julio Montaner.

"Because prevention will be definitely established at this conference as the new standard of care."

Other research will show it is possible to decrease HIV transmission rates by 95 percent.

"We now have the opportunity of ending the pandemic," said Montaner, challenging politicians to support treatment.

"Leaders of the world, you're either with us or against us. We know the evidence. It's up to you as to whether you will be counted as doing the right thing."

He read out a letter to the conference from the Vatican promoting treatment and prevention.

"If the pope gets it, everybody else should," Montaner told a news conference prior to the conference opening Sunday night.

Michel Sidibe of UNAIDS said investments in HIV diagnosis and treatment pay off, and noted the world had beat its goal of having 15 million of the world's 35 million people diagnosed with HIV in [treatment](#) by 2015.

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