GENEVA, 16 February 2012: The World Health Organization (WHO) has concluded, on the advice of its Guidelines Review Committee, that women living with HIV or at high risk of HIV can safely continue to use hormonal contraceptives to prevent pregnancy. The recommendation follows a thorough review of evidence about links between hormonal contraceptive use and HIV acquisition

Current WHO recommendations in the *Medical eligibility criteria for contraceptive use* (2009 edition) therefore remain: there are no restrictions on the use of any hormonal contraceptive method for women living with HIV or at high risk of HIV. Couples seeking to prevent both unintended pregnancy and HIV should be strongly advised to use dual protection – condoms and another effective contraceptive method, such as hormonal contraceptives.

A study published in *Lancet Infectious Diseases* in October 2011 suggested that hormonal contraceptives, such as the pill or injectable contraceptives, may increase a woman's risk of HIV infection. It also found that women living with HIV and using hormonal contraception may be more likely to transmit the virus to their partner than women who did not use hormonal contraception.

WHO convened a technical consultation from 31 January -1 February 2012 to review findings from all recent epidemiological studies on the issue. The meeting brought together 75 experts from 18 countries to review existing WHO recommendations in the light of these findings.

The experts recommended that women living with HIV, or at high risk of HIV, continue to use hormonal contraceptives to prevent pregnancy, but emphasized the need to also use condoms to prevent HIV acquisition and transmission. They also stressed the need for further research on the issue and the importance of offering a wider choice of contraceptive options.

On 15 February WHO's Guidelines Review Committee upheld the recommendations. The Guidelines Review Committee is the body responsible for ensuring that all WHO recommendations are based on the best available scientific evidence and have been developed in a transparent, unbiased and clearly reported manner.

The full statement of the technical consultation will be available at this address.

http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/topics/family_planning/hc_hiv/en/index.html