A NEW study involving nine women from the Democratic Republic of Congo showed a disproporionately high number of the women who became pregnant during the postpartum period following a viral infection. The study, which was published in the journal *Science*, provides new insights into the potential for antenatal treatment to prevent HIV transmission from mother to child.

These findings come from a joint study by researchers at the University of Cape Town in South Africa and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The study, published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, is featured as the cover article.

Women who are HIV positive have a 30% chance of transmitting the virus to their baby if they do not receive antiretroviral treatment. By contrast, if they receive antiretroviral treatment while pregnant, the risk of transmission drops to just 1%.

Until now, this viral reservoir was thought to be formed continuously over many years, starting from the onset of antiretroviral treatment.

The new study investigated nine women on antiretroviral treatment and found that the viral reservoir was formed in just a few years, rather than for at least four years. These women had been on treatment for an average of six years as part of the CAPRISA 002 cohort study in South Africa.

In these women, the joint SA-TUS group found that only one woman had detectable latent viruses in the reservoir, which had been already cleared with antiretroviral treatment.

A new technique called the inhibitor drug elusion (IDE) can help to develop new approaches to treat latent infected cells.

The study's findings suggest that if more antiretroviral regimens were developed to target the latent reservoir, this could be used to develop additional interventions at the time antiretroviral treatment is stopped.

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