



**Over 25 per cent of girls in schools are obese, says health secretary V.K. Subburaj.**



**The process of granting approval to new engg colleges to take time: Mannar Jawahar**



**Govt need comply: M.S.**

● COUPLES WERE OBSERVED FOR FIVE YEARS, GIVEN COUNSELLING

## ART cuts HIV transmission: Study

DC CORRESPONDENT

CHENNAI

May 13: It is the next best thing to a vaccine — researchers have found that Antiretroviral Therapy (ART) when given early to HIV-positive people prevents sexual transmission of the virus to a great extent.

Clinical trials performed on 250 couples in and around Chennai, who were monitored since 2005, has provided the first solid evidence that ART reduces risk of transmission, by lowering the viral load in the patient.

Funded by the United State's National Institute of Health, the study known as 'HPTN-052' was conducted on 1,763 couples from across Asia, Africa and the America. Chennai's subject group was the largest. The



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result of the research was released here on Friday.

"We involved around 250 sero-discordant couples —

couples with one HIV-positive and one HIV-negative partner. Half of the HIV infected persons were given antiretroviral drugs, and came under the Immediate ART group. The other half were not given ART until they absolutely needed it for health reasons," explained N. Kumarasamy, principal investigator of the study and Chief Medical Officer of the YRG Care Centre where the trials were performed.

The couples were observed for five years, during which all of them were given counselling on safe sex practices and use of condoms and were treated for sexually transmitted diseases.

At the end of the study period, researchers found that the use of ART in infected partners reduced

the risk of transmission to their healthy sexual partners by a staggering 96 per cent when compared to those not given ART.

Antiretroviral therapy, a combination of drugs to fight the AIDS virus, is currently only given to patients with a CD4 cell count below 350. However, the encouraging findings of the trial are expected to change these guidelines to prescribe ART as soon as a patient is diagnosed as HIV-positive.

"We have found that there is no point in delaying ART — patients benefit from the medication from day 1. Not only does it improve their health and prevent opportunistic infections like tuberculosis, but also prevents the spread of the disease," explained Dr Kumarasamy.