

Breast milk ingredient kills HIV

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Singapore: A new research conducted by Dr Angela Wahl and her colleagues at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill has highlighted that breast milk is a potent HIV-fighter.

Dr Wahl and her team created mice with human bone marrow, liver and thymus tissues that all became infected with HIV if the mice were given an oral dose of the virus. However, if the rodents were fed breast milk containing HIV, the virus wasn't transmitted. An unknown component of breast milk appears to kill HIV particles and virus-infected cells, as well as blocking HIV transmission in mice with a human immune system.

This infection data is true even in the case of human babies. Infants born to HIV-positive mothers avoid infection during birth and around 15 percent contract HIV in early childhood.

Earlier research has hinted that breast milk might have antiviral properties, but it was unclear if it would prevent HIV transmission. "We have shown that milk has an intrinsic innate ability to kill HIV," said Dr J Victor Garcia, who supervised the work.

The hunt is now on for the mysterious ingredient in breast milk that inhibits the virus. If it can be identified, it might even be used to prevent other forms of HIV transmission, such as sexual transmission.