

# THE ART OF RESEARCH



## Improving preterm birth and infant health in sub-Saharan Africa

Studying vaginal health during pregnancy may allow researchers to develop new interventions to identify women at risk of preterm birth.

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**W**omen with HIV are at higher risk of experiencing preterm birth, and infants born preterm often suffer from poorer health later in life. Every woman should experience a healthy pregnancy, giving her child the opportunity to grow and develop without restrictions.

Preterm birth is a major contributor to newborn deaths, which account for 45% of deaths of children under the age of five in sub-Saharan Africa. Infants born prematurely have poorer health outcomes, which are magnified in resource-limited settings.

Anna-Ursula Happel studies the relationship between vaginal health (specifically vaginal bacteria and viruses) during pregnancy and preterm birth in South African women with HIV. The results of this project will inform doctors and nurses who provide clinical care to pregnant women in South Africa. It will also inform the South African National Strategic Plan for Maternal, Newborn, Child and Women's Health.

“Understanding the interplay between vaginal viruses and bacteria during pregnancy and preterm birth is important for developing novel diagnostics and interventions for decreasing preterm birth occurrence among women with HIV,” says Happel.



*Failure to improve birth outcomes will cause neonatal deaths to remain unacceptably high.*

Presented in association with the Institute of Infectious Disease and Molecular Medicine, this programme forms part of #theArtOfResearch, an initiative of research communication specialists Jive Media Africa.

This will decrease mortality and improve the health of sub-Saharan African infants.

“If we fail to improve birth outcomes, neonatal deaths will

continue to remain unacceptably high and we will continue to deprive children of the opportunity to develop to their fullest potential.”

