

Children of HIV-positive mothers need adoptive homes_62705

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By Felicia Fuller

Buckner Baptist Benevolences

DALLAS—A toffee-skinned bundle with coal-black hair stretches and wriggles, then poses with one finger against her dimpled cheek. Not yet a month old, Baby Cassidy already is charming on-lookers.

She is one of about 80 Dallas infants born annually to mothers infected with the human immunodeficiency virus. Despite her prenatal exposure, pediatric AIDS specialists insist Cassidy has a less than 5 percent chance of contracting HIV. That's because her birthmother was compliant with her HIV medication, maintained an undetectable viral load and delivered by Caesarean section.

Cassidy is one of an average 80 Dallas infants born annually to mothers infected with the human immunodeficiency virus. Despite her prenatal exposure, pediatric AIDS specialists say she has a less than 5 percent chance of contracting HIV.

“We have had only one exposed child test positive in the past four years,” said Mary Mallory, nurse practitioner at the ARMS Clinic at Children's Medical Center in Dallas, where 95 percent of HIV-exposed infants are referred.

To potential adoptive parents, she adds that Cassidy “is at low risk for having acquired HIV” and is “no risk to have in their home.”

Officials at Buckner Domestic Adoption hope that by dispelling misconceptions about prenatal exposure to HIV, Cassidy soon will be permanently placed in a loving, Christian home.

“Buckner's commitment to Cassidy and to her birthmother is to find a family who will bring her up to know the Lord; who will recognize and help Cassidy recognize the depth of her birthmother's love; and who will be able to help her refute all the misperceptions about prenatal exposure to HIV,”

said Adela Jones, director of Buckner Adoption & Maternity Services.

Caseworkers say Cassidy, who weighed 7 pounds, 13 ounces at birth and measured 20 and one-half inches, is an apparently healthy baby who will require no special care other than traditional well-baby visits and vaccinations. Her HIV tests at two days and two weeks after her birth were negative, and she has completed the six-week round of oral HIV-preventative medicine given to exposed infants.

Cassidy will undergo HIV tests using DNA amplification at 2 months and 6 months old, after which she officially can be declared HIV-free, and “no further testing will be needed,” Mallory said.

Maternal HIV antibodies may be present in an HIV-negative baby for up to 15 months, after which the baby loses its mother's antibodies and begins to build its own, she added.

“We do not do HIV-antibody testing on exposed infants for this reason,” she explained. “The DNA amplification test looks for the virus itself, not antibodies to the virus. “Because HIV is all that we do, we are able to offer education and support to our families as well as medical care,” she continued. “We have a multidisciplinary team, including a social worker, developmental specialist and bilingual client advocate.”

Buckner will provide extensive medical information to potential adoptive parents, including the birthmother's prenatal report, hospital records, and social and genetic background information, Jones said.

In addition to Cassidy, Buckner has three other clients due to have children this summer.

“All of these children are reported to be biracial, and one of these children has had exposure to drugs, alcohol and HIV. We are looking for families for all of these children,” Jones said.

“Pray for Cassidy and other children needing permanent families,” she urged. “We firmly believe God has the right family for them, and we ask you to pray for that end.”

For more information about Cassidy or Buckner Adoption and Maternity Services, visit www.buckneradoption.org or write domesticadoption@buckner.org. Interested families outside Texas can contact Adela Jones directly at ajones@buckner.org.

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