

# U = U

Undetectable = Untransmittable



**NZAF**  
Te Tūāpapa Mate  
Āraikore o Aotearoa





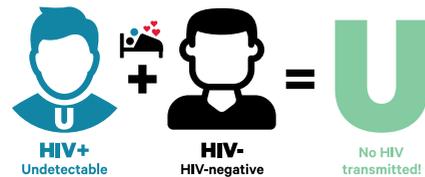
## Contents

What is U=U?	4
<hr/>	
The science	6
<hr/>	
The impact	8
<hr/>	
What can U=U mean for me?	10
As someone living with HIV	12
As someone who's HIV-negative	14
<hr/>	
How can we all help end HIV stigma?	16
<hr/>	
Need to talk to someone?	18
<hr/>	
Other links	19
<hr/>	
Glossary	20
<hr/>	
References	22

## What is Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U)?

The science is clear. People living with HIV can feel confident that if they have an undetectable viral load and take their treatment as prescribed, they cannot pass on HIV to sexual partners.\*

Studies clearly show that persons living with HIV who were on treatment and maintained a undetectable viral load, or viral load of below 200 copies/mL, for at least six months **cannot** transmit HIV to their sexual partners.



The inspiringly simple choice of wording for **Undetectable = Untransmittable**, by the Prevention Access Campaign (PAC), has distilled the science down into a simple phrase that made everything easily understandable and shareable.

The community pickup of U=U has been nothing short of a grassroots revolution and is a testament to the dedicated people who heard the science and saw there was no wider awareness. They took this simple and powerful statement to the world.

PAC stood up for people living with HIV on the world stage and made it clear that our communities deserve the right to accurate and meaningful information about their social, sexual, and reproductive health that was based on science - not stigma\*.

Find out more about PAC and the impact of U=U around the globe: [preventionaccess.org](http://preventionaccess.org)

NZAF had the pleasure of sitting down and speaking with one of the founders of PAC. You can watch the video of our time with Bruce Richman at [nzaf.org.nz/watchu=u](http://nzaf.org.nz/watchu=u)

U=U is a universal message too, with global translations that follow the same simple equation: If you have an undetectable viral load = HIV **cannot** be transmitted sexually.

For some of you, it may take time to come to terms with the idea – that’s fine, we’re all on our own journeys. You may have been told for years by the health sector that you’d never be able to have sex without a condom. You may have just heard about it and it’s still sinking in. Whatever the reason, sit with the information in this book for a while, and reach out if you need someone to talk to about it - page 18.

### U=U messaging throughout the world

See opposite page: top-to-bottom, left-to-right

**New Zealand:** Sperm Positive: The World’s First HIV Positive Sperm Bank, December 2019. *“They can give you their eyes, their hair, their cheeky laugh. But they can’t give you HIV.”*

**Global:** Grindr in-app messaging campaign.

**France:** City of Paris Faisons L’Amour, Summer 2017.

Translation: *Martin is HIV positive and does not transmit HIV because he takes his treatment.*

**Netherlands:** HIV Vereniging Nederland, November 2016.

*U=U Undetectable means Uninfectious.*

**US:** NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene, December 2016 – *WESTAYSURE*.

**UK:** London HIV Prevention Programme – the official public health HIV Prevention programme of 31 London boroughs and the City of London, August 2017. *Do It London*, city-wide public health campaign.

**US:** Housing Works, San Francisco, December 2016.

*The Undetectables*, an incentive-based programme to help people with HIV achieve viral suppression.

**France:** AIDES, Summer 2017. *#LovePositive* Social marketing PRIDE campaign & t-shirts.

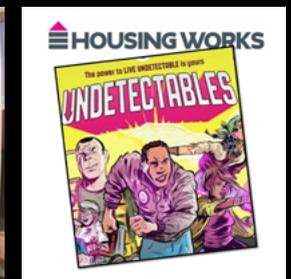
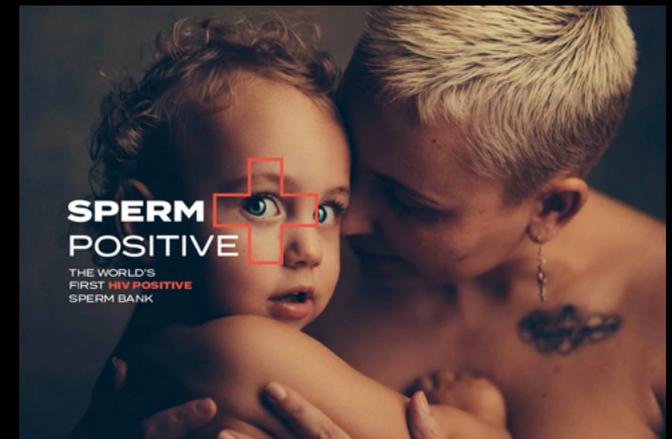
**Europe:** *#HравноH*, Campaign for EECA Countries.

**Switzerland:** *Dr. Gay* – Social marketing campaign.

Translation: *“HIV-positive. Not Infectious.”*

\* Prevention Access Campaign – [preventionaccess.org](http://preventionaccess.org)

Complex science distilled down to a simple, powerful statement that has been shared across the globe.



Lower nine items on this page: artwork compiled by [preventionaccess.org](http://preventionaccess.org)

## The science

How do we know U=U is true? Over a decade's worth of scientific research, global endorsements of the findings, top researchers confirming this on the world stage, and over 150,000 acts of condomless sex and no linked HIV transmissions!

You may have heard of the **Swiss Statement**<sup>1</sup>. The Swiss National AIDS Commission released a statement in 2008 and, based on the evidence available at the time, deemed the risk of transmission “negligible” – which means, “so small or unimportant as not to be worth considering; insignificant”. Since this statement, results from further, large-scale trials have been released and we now know that the risk is even lower than “negligible”, and there were **no** linked HIV transmissions in any of these studies.

### Let's look at the studies

Several large trials have been done to assess the risk of infection from an HIV-positive partner with undetectable viral load in serodiscordant couples.

#### HPTN-052<sup>2</sup>

HPTN 052 was one of the first large trials (it enrolled 1,762 couples, most of whom were heterosexual) to assess the effectiveness of antiretroviral therapy in preventing HIV transmission. The first results were published in 2011 and no linked transmissions were found from persons living with HIV who maintained viral suppression for at least 6 months.

#### PARTNER<sup>3</sup>

The PARTNER study, published in full in 2016, also recorded zero linked transmissions from undetectable partners after serodiscordant couples had 58,000 acts of condomless sex.

#### Opposites attract<sup>4</sup>

Another similar study, Opposites Attract, also found zero linked transmissions while following 358 serodiscordant gay male couples in three countries and over 17,000 acts of condomless sex.

#### PARTNER 2<sup>5</sup>

The PARTNER study was later extended with PARTNER 2, published in 2019, which recorded 77,000 times where gay male couples had condomless anal sex and, still, no linked transmissions were identified.

#### What does all of this tell us?

Basically, it confirms that people living with HIV who maintain an undetectable viral load (UVL) for at least six months **cannot** transmit HIV to sexual partners.

In over 150,000 acts of condomless sex there was not a single case of HIV acquisition in the HIV-negative partner linked to relying on UVL as a form of prevention.

This is actually not new news – the idea that treatment of HIV could be an effective prevention tool has been circulating for over a decade. But, the groundswell of support for the science behind U=U has been growing rapidly over the last few years – which is why you might only be hearing about it now.



## The impact

U=U means many different things for many different people. For some it alleviates fear they've been experiencing in their own lives around transmission. For others it means a sense of empowerment, of being able to take control of their lives once again – not feeling held hostage by the virus.

For most it will also be a tool of dismantling HIV stigma, one that can be used to educate wider society in the hopes of reducing misinformation, discrimination and tackling misconceptions of HIV.

You only need to ask someone living with HIV what U=U means for them to truly get a picture of how impactful this knowledge can be.

“[U=U] lifts the shame of living with HIV, the fear of passing HIV on to sexual partners and makes it easier to disclose my HIV status”



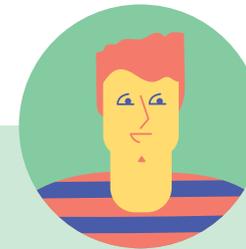
“For me, U=U means I get to live a healthy and normal life without fear of passing on HIV to my HIV-negative partner. It can take a while to really believe that being undetectable means you can't pass on HIV sexually. I spent a long time doubting it, which really impacted the intimacy in my relationship. The doubt passed as the science backing U=U continued to stack up. Now, I pretty much get to forget my HIV status and get on with the rest of my life.”



“Being told you have an undetectable viral load is great news and is probably the second-best news for people that have already been living with HIV for a while, since the initial discovery that there was medication that could save our lives. Undetectable viral load lifts the shame of living with HIV, the fear of passing HIV on to sexual partners and makes it easier to disclose my HIV status. Now we can take our medication for not only the purpose of staying alive, but for other possibilities like having children without going through hellish procedures. It brings the hope of living a life just like anyone else's.”



“U=U means that I am not going to die alone. Why? Because even though I've encountered marvellous men in the past, who were HIV-negative and wanted to be in a loving relationship with me – before I knew about U=U, it was always at the back of my mind that I would feel terribly guilty if I passed HIV on. Now, knowing U=U is effective, real and the science is becoming more widely known, I can be more sure that I can find love. I can have good, intimate sex and can continue with my life as I thought I would before I became HIV-positive. It is like getting my life back. I feel empowered to take back control of my life.”



“U=U gives me hope. Hope that other people will learn and believe that I cannot transmit HIV sexually. Then, all of the stigma that has been poured onto me – all the thoughts I had when I first contracted HIV: about spending the rest of my life alone, thinking that nobody would love me, thinking I'd never be intimate again and no one would want to get involved with me – will fade away, little by little.”

What can U=U mean for me?



## What can U=U mean for me as someone living with HIV?

It means that there is no risk of transmission between you and your sexual partners – it also means that you can live a longer, healthier life, as HIV will not be able to continue damaging your immune system. It should also give you confidence and help break down some of the internal stigma you may experience due to the fear of transmitting HIV. Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U) is a message of empowerment, hope and wellbeing.

If you've been living with HIV for a while now and are only just hearing about U=U, it can be a lot to take in - as it likely contrasts what you've been told in the past. Take some time with it and reach out to us if you need someone to talk to.

If you've only just received your diagnosis, hopefully you have also been handed this booklet and will be able to believe U=U right from day one.

### **What do I need to know?**

#### **Adherence**

Taking medication every day for the rest of your life is no small ask, but the benefits to making sure you keep taking your treatment as prescribed are numerous. Keeping up with your medication is the best way to ensure better health outcomes and, if you're able to, quickly reaching and maintaining an undetectable viral load (UVL), as well as forming a consistent routine that will make your meds easier to manage.

Taking breaks from your medication or forgetting your medication too often can result in an increase in viral load and potentially resistances to your antiretroviral treatment (ART). Any issues with adherence should be talked about with your specialist or GP – it's also a good idea to talk with any peers, who have been through starting out on treatment, for tips and tricks on keeping up-to-date with your meds.

#### **Babies and breastfeeding**

A lot of people don't know this – we're trying to shout it from the rooftops – but people living with HIV, who are on effective treatment and have an undetectable viral load, can safely conceive and give birth without transmitting HIV to their babies. Any pregnancies, or attempts to conceive, should be discussed with your specialist, so they can support you through this journey and keep an eye on your health.

While the Ministry of Health doesn't currently recommend breastfeeding while living with HIV, it is possible and a discussion with your specialist would help you make an informed decision. Luckily, in Aotearoa, we have affordable breastfeeding alternatives if needed.

#### **Disclosure**

Disclosure basically means sharing your HIV status and when you might want or need to do so. In an ideal world, you would feel safe disclosing in any situation, as there would be no stigma attached, but we know that this is not yet the case – below is some advice to look after yourself in a less-than-ideal world, as we work to dismantle HIV stigma.

It's important to remember that New Zealand has a robust human rights framework that protects you from needing to disclose your HIV status in the workplace, your personal life or even in many healthcare settings. This framework also works to prevent any discrimination levelled at you because of your status. For example, you cannot be fired or stopped from attaining employment for living with HIV – this is illegal.

When it comes to sex, under New Zealand law, you will need to either use condoms or talk to your partner about your status to protect yourself legally. It's likely this will change over time, but for now – make sure you're covering yourself legally.

**The legalese:** Under New Zealand law, everyone has a legal duty not to endanger the life, health or safety of others. In law, this means that people living with HIV must take 'reasonable precautions' to avoid transmitting HIV to sexual partners. 'Reasonable precautions' means participating in sexual activities that involve very low/no risk of transmission, for example, using condoms for anal, front-hole and vaginal sex. The legal consequences of having UVL as a 'reasonable precaution' have not been tested in NZ court, even though the science shows you cannot transmit HIV sexually.

Remember, who you tell in your day-to-day social life, workplace and even your family, is your own decision. It's your right to only share your status with the people you want to. You may want to tell some of your trusted friends and family, as this will help them to support you. Before you do bring anyone into the loop, ask yourself these questions: **Will they support me? Will they respect my confidentiality? Will it help me if they know?**

#### **Life expectancy**

Your medication will keep the virus from damaging your immune system further and by looking after yourself physically and emotionally, you can live a long and healthy life.

#### **STIs**

U=U is pretty amazing and can mean a whole new lease on your sex life. But, one thing it doesn't do is prevent the transmission of other STIs. New Zealand is in the midst of an STI epidemic, especially when it comes to syphilis – so you will need to keep in mind that using condoms with casual partners is still an important part of preventing the further transmission of STIs. For those who frequently aren't using condoms consistently with casual partners, it's important to test more regularly for STIs to ensure they're treated quickly – which reduces the chances of onward transmission and keeps yourself and your partners safe.

## What can U=U mean for me as someone who's HIV-negative?

It means that a person living with HIV and an undetectable viral load (UVL) **cannot** transmit HIV to you sexually. Which makes Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U) another HIV prevention tool alongside condoms and PrEP. It should also help break down any fears and misconceptions you may have about HIV. This empowers you and any people in your life who are living with HIV to have friendships, relationships, great sex and more without the shadow of stigma or misinformation.

U=U is one of the biggest scientific discoveries in HIV, since the birth of effective antiretroviral treatment. It also signals an end in sight for new transmissions and for the stigma people living with HIV face.

U=U can also bolster your ability to support any people in your life who are living with HIV, as well as equip you to confront HIV stigma out in the world – which supports all people living with HIV. Remember, HIV stigma usually causes more harm than the virus itself, when treated.

### What do I need to know?

#### **Combatting HIV stigma**

One of the most harmful things in the lives of people living with HIV today, is the HIV stigma fuelled by misinformation and the resulting attitudes and actions. A lot of this stigma comes from misconceptions feeding people's fears of transmission. Therefore, now that you know about U=U, you can combat any misinformation you encounter and help us to educate people about the realities of HIV and how it is transmitted. Spread the word, not stigma!

U=U empowers you to be an educated ally of people living with HIV and to keep demolishing HIV stigma. Not only this, but if you have sexual encounters with people who are living with HIV – already knowing and believing U=U goes a long way to creating a space that's safe and accepting to disclose in.

#### **HIV prevention**

If any of your sexual partners are living with HIV and have UVL, they **cannot** transmit HIV sexually. This means U=U is a very effective way of preventing HIV transmission.

#### **STIs**

Knowing what U=U does and doesn't mean is important, especially if you are employing it as an HIV prevention method with your partners. One thing it doesn't do is prevent the transmission of other STIs. New Zealand is in the midst of an STI epidemic, especially when it comes to syphilis – so you will need to keep in mind that using condoms with casual partners is still an important part of preventing the further transmission of STIs.

For those who frequently aren't using condoms consistently with casual partners, it's important to test more regularly for STIs to ensure they're treated quickly – which reduces the chances of onward transmission and keeps yourself and your partners safe.

*Spread the word,  
not stigma!*



“As a PrEP user, I feel that there is a shared understanding of the importance of taking daily medication and it has been through taking PrEP that I have been able to fully understand the importance of U=U. These conversations are an essential way to help combat serophobia and open up avenues for intimacy. On a deeply personal level, the knowledge that U=U allows me to connect with people in an innately intimate way, free from the shroud of fear and apprehension.”

## How can we all help end HIV stigma?

HIV treatment has come a long way over the last 30 years, but unfortunately, sometimes it seems that attitudes toward HIV have not.

**When we say that stigma is the most harmful issue facing people living with HIV in New Zealand today, we aren't exaggerating.**

HIV stigma is fuelled by misinformation, attitudes and actions that are based in fear that has no factual basis.

By learning the truth about HIV transmission and living with HIV today, you can help combat stigma and make the world a safer and kinder place.

**Here are some facts that we want everyone to know:**

- Firstly, although gay, bisexual and other men who have sex with men are most at risk of acquiring HIV in New Zealand, HIV can affect anyone, no matter their gender, sexuality, age or ethnicity. HIV is not a 'gay disease'.
- Today's medications can suppress the virus to extremely low levels, usually to the point where people living with HIV can live long, healthy lives and cannot pass on HIV sexually.
- Stigma is not only damaging, but actually fuels the spread of HIV. If people are scared of being diagnosed with HIV and how others will treat and perceive them, then they're much less likely to get tested – undiagnosed HIV is the main way that the virus is transmitted!

If everyone who reads this starts with some of the following, we'll be taking huge steps in the right direction.

### Educate yourself about HIV

HIV can only be transmitted in a few specific ways. You cannot contract HIV from sharing a living space with, eating food prepared by or making out with someone living with HIV. Knowing how HIV works, and more importantly how it doesn't, means there are less people out there spreading misinformation about HIV.

### Tell others what you've learned

Stigma is largely perpetuated by unnecessary fear of transmission that stems from misunderstanding – educating ourselves and others is one of the biggest steps toward ending HIV stigma.

### Spread U=U, not stigma

Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U) is not only an empowering message for those living with HIV, but an anti-stigma message for those who are HIV-negative. If there is no risk of transmission with their own sexual partners – why would there be a risk to the general public? Please tell everyone you know about U=U.

### Cut out the "AIDS" jokes

AIDS is not the same thing as HIV, it is the syndrome that can develop when HIV compromises someone's immune system to the point where it cannot fight off opportunistic infections and cancers... which isn't super funny now, is it?

Seemingly little things, like making a joke out of a serious health condition, can have a hugely harmful impact and stop people seeking help, testing and treatment.

Most people living with HIV, if they can be connected to effective treatment, will never develop AIDS, so let's just stop it.

### Call it out

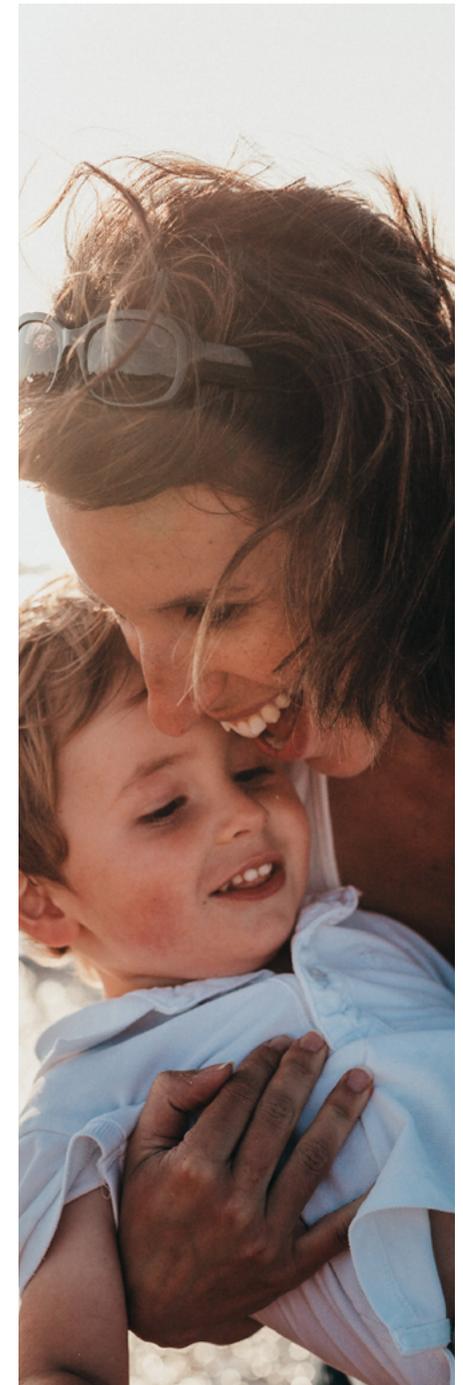
There are a lot of pervasive forms of bigotry in our society. Many of which have become so casual the perpetrators probably don't even notice they do it anymore. It's time to call it out for what it is. There are many people who brazenly attack people living with HIV online – and there are many more who drop stigma-bombs casually in conversation and expect to go unchallenged. Let's be a part of changing that! If you see it on social media, hit that report button and if it comes up in conversation, be brave and challenge them.

### No one "deserves" to have HIV

Don't let anyone say so. This is a nasty one we see a lot. No one deserves to contract HIV because of their sexuality or behaviour, let's cut this one off right at the bud. Stop it and don't let anyone else say so unchallenged.

### Support people who share their status

If someone shares their HIV status with you, listen to them and take time with them to understand what it all means – especially if they've only just found out themselves. So often, people who receive a positive result have a bad interaction the first time they disclose, which can cause harmful internalised stigma to take root and people might withdraw from social settings and sometimes even healthcare.



## Need to talk to someone?

### Counselling

The **New Zealand AIDS Foundation** offers free and confidential counselling for anyone living with or affected by HIV, including partners, friends and whānau.

Whether you want to talk about a recent diagnosis, anything to do with your sexual or mental health, or general well-being – our skilled team of professional counsellors across the country can spend time working through this with you.



New Zealand AIDS Foundation  
Te Tūāpapa Mate Āraikore o Aotearoa

Visit [nzaf.org.nz/counselling](https://nzaf.org.nz/counselling)  
or phone 0800 802 437 to request  
an appointment today

### Speak with a peer



The **New Zealand AIDS Foundation (NZAF)** has many services for people living with HIV and their whānau, friends and partners. As well as free counselling, NZAF offers a peer support and social group for and by people living with HIV: Tōrunga Club. This aims to be a safe space to meet other people living with HIV to share and support each other.

To find out more:

[nzaf.org.nz](https://nzaf.org.nz)  
 0800 802 437



**Body Positive** is a peer support organisation run by and for people living with HIV in Aotearoa. Its Peer Navigator programme and peer support groups are good ways to speak to people who have been through some of the things you may be experiencing or thinking about and have had many of the same questions you might have about health systems, U=U and much more.

To find out more:

[bodypositive.org.nz](https://bodypositive.org.nz)  
 0800 448 5463



**Positive Women Inc.** is a peer support organisation run by women living with HIV for women living with and affected by HIV in Aotearoa. Positive Women Inc. runs annual retreats for women living with HIV in New Zealand, which is a valuable way to meet peers, get support and form new friendships.

A weekday drop-in service and freephone service (9am-5pm Mon-Fri) is available for any information or support you may need.

To find out more:

[positivewomen.org.nz](https://positivewomen.org.nz)  
 0800 769 848

## Other links



**aidsmap**

HIV & AIDS – sharing knowledge, changing lives.

[nzaf.org.nz/aidsmap](https://nzaf.org.nz/aidsmap)



**Ending HIV NZ**

Easily shareable video explaining U=U courtesy of drag superstar Courtney Act.

[endinghiv.org.nz/u-u](https://endinghiv.org.nz/u-u)



**POZ**

An online and print magazine offering daily news, treatment updates, personal profiles, investigative features, videos, blogs and an extensive online social network of people living with HIV.

[nzaf.org.nz/poz](https://nzaf.org.nz/poz)



**Prevention Access Campaign**

A health equity initiative to end the dual epidemics of HIV and HIV-related stigma.

[nzaf.org.nz/pac](https://nzaf.org.nz/pac)



**UNAIDS**

The Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS.

[nzaf.org.nz/un aids](https://nzaf.org.nz/un aids)



# Glossary

Definitions for some of the important terms in this booklet:

## Adherence

This simply means how well you stick to taking your medication as prescribed. Any issues with adherence should be talked about with a specialist or GP – it's also a good idea to talk with any peers who have been through starting out on treatment, and ask them for tips on keeping up-to-date with meds. It's important to take them correctly to give the body its best chance at better health outcomes and, for those who are able to, reaching an undetectable viral load sooner.

## AIDS

AIDS stands for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome – this describes either, a CD4 T-cell count below 200, or a group of symptoms and opportunistic cancers and infections that can develop when the immune system has been compromised by HIV.

It's important to remember that most people living with HIV, if they can be connected to effective treatment, will never develop AIDS.

Sometimes, if someone is diagnosed with HIV quite late after infection, they may also be diagnosed with AIDS. They may have been living with a CD4 count lower than 200 without presenting any symptoms or may have developed opportunistic infections or diseases which lead to an AIDS diagnosis.

Modern medication will help most of these people recover – as antiretroviral treatments reduce the copies of the virus in their system and allow enough immune cells to be restored.

AIDS and HIV are not the same thing.

## Antiretroviral Treatment (ART)

This describes the group of drug treatments that are used to stop HIV replicating and to protect the immune system. There are several different classes of antiretrovirals, and they all work in slightly different ways.

Today, HIV medications have significantly fewer side-effects and can often be prescribed in one or two pills. The sooner after diagnosis treatment is started, the sooner better health outcomes and, for those who are able to, an undetectable viral load can be reached.

## CD4

CD4 cells (or T4-cells, Helper T-cells, or T-cells) are a subset of white blood cells. CD4 cells are a critical part of the immune system and play an important role in helping fend off infections and diseases. These are the cells that are infected and destroyed by HIV.

## Disclosure

Disclosure is the sharing of one's HIV status with someone and describes situations when someone might want, or need, to do so. When choosing to disclose HIV status, it should be because doing so will support that person's own wellbeing – be that legal, social or medical.

It's important to remember that New Zealand has a robust human rights framework that protects people living with HIV from needing to disclose their HIV status in the workplace, personal lives or even in most healthcare settings. See [page 13](#) for more detail about different disclosure situations and rights.

## HIV

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus – it is a virus that enters into immune cells and turns them into “factories” to produce more virus and eventually kills the infected cell. As more virus is produced, more cells become factories which depletes the number of immune cells – compromising the body's immune system and, without treatment, leaving it vulnerable to cancers and infections.

HIV is transmitted via certain bodily fluids – primarily blood and semen. In New Zealand most transmissions occur through unprotected sex.

HIV is not transmitted by hugging, kissing, sharing food, sneezing, living in the same space or using the same toilet seat – and don't let anyone say otherwise.

Modern antiretroviral treatments mean HIV is now a manageable condition. While there is currently no cure for HIV, medication enables people living with HIV to live longer, healthier lives.

## Serodiscordant couples

A Serodiscordant couple is one where one partner is living with HIV and the other is HIV-negative.

## Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

These are the viral, bacterial and fungal infections whose main means of transmission is sexual activity. Syphilis, chlamydia, gonorrhoea, herpes, HPV – and the list goes on. While having an undetectable viral load means HIV cannot be passed on sexually without condoms – it does not stop the transmission or acquisition of other STIs. So, it's a good idea to keep condoms in the mix with casual partners. For those who frequently aren't using condoms consistently with casual partners, it's important to test more regularly for STIs to ensure they're treated quickly – which reduces the chances of onward transmission and keeps all participants safe.

## Stigma

Cambridge defines stigma as: *a strong feeling of disapproval that most people in society have about something, especially when this disapproval is unfair.* HIV stigma is the external or internal feeling of disapproval experienced by people living with HIV.

HIV stigma is triggered or made worse by actions, policies or misunderstandings we describe as stigmatising. This is because they increase the effect of stigma or remind people of the stigma they have already experienced.

For example, when people spread misinformation about HIV transmission, or inappropriately treat people living with HIV as a risk in situations when there is no risk. Or, when people living with HIV are rejected sexually due to their HIV status, even when condoms, PrEP or U=U remove the risk of transmission.

For most people living with HIV today, the stigma is more harmful than HIV itself – this is especially hurtful when it is something we can all reduce and stop spreading. Find out more about how to help stop the spread of HIV stigma on [page 16](#).

The term serophobia may also be encountered. Much like xenophobia and homophobia, serophobia is an extreme or irrational fear of or aversion to someone or something – in this case, aimed at people living with HIV and HIV in general.

## Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U)

We now know that someone with an undetectable viral load cannot transmit HIV to sexual partners, even when condoms aren't used. In fact, studies clearly show that persons living with HIV who maintained a viral load of below 200 copies/mL for six months or longer **cannot** transmit HIV to sexual partners. The results of rigorous scientific studies have shown the risk of transmission is even lower than “negligible” and there were no linked HIV transmissions in any of these studies. This is the basis of the Undetectable = Untransmittable message.

## Undetectable Viral Load (UVL)

Antiretroviral treatment works by preventing the virus from replicating. When the amount of HIV in a person's system is so low that it cannot be measured by a standard viral load blood test, or reaches a viral load of below 200 copies/mL, they are considered to have an undetectable viral load.

Most people living with HIV who are on effective treatment will reach an undetectable viral load within six months of beginning treatment. Not everyone can reach an undetectable viral load though, so no one should feel they have to – nor feel bad if they can't.

## Viral Load (VL)

Viral load is a measure of the amount of HIV in the bloodstream. Knowing how much HIV is present is an indicator of how active the virus is, and the level of the risk of transmission and damage to the immune system. A blood test will be able to determine viral load – this is part of how clinicians will track the effectiveness of treatment options and monitor the need for any changes.





New Zealand AIDS Foundation  
Te Tūāpapa Mātē Āraikore o Aotearoa

