

Undetectable= Untransmittable (U=U) Messaging Guide Tailored for the community in Rwanda.



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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ART	Antiretroviral Therapy
HCP	Healthcare Providers
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
HPTN052	HIV Prevention Trials Network (052)
IEC BCC	Information, Education, and Communication Behavior Change Communication
PE	Peer Educator
PLHIV	People Living with HIV
PrEP	Pre-Exposure prophylaxis
RBC	Rwanda Biomedical Centre
RRP+	Rwanda Network of People Living with HIV – RRP+
STIs	Sexually Transmitted Infections
TWG	Technical Working Group
U=U	Undetectable = Untransmittable
UNAIDS	Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS
VL	Viral Load
WHO	World Health Organization

Acknowledgement

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We are sincerely grateful to Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) for providing the financial support that made the development of this guide possible. Your commitment to advancing HIV prevention, treatment literacy, and stigma reduction continues to inspire and strengthen our collective efforts.

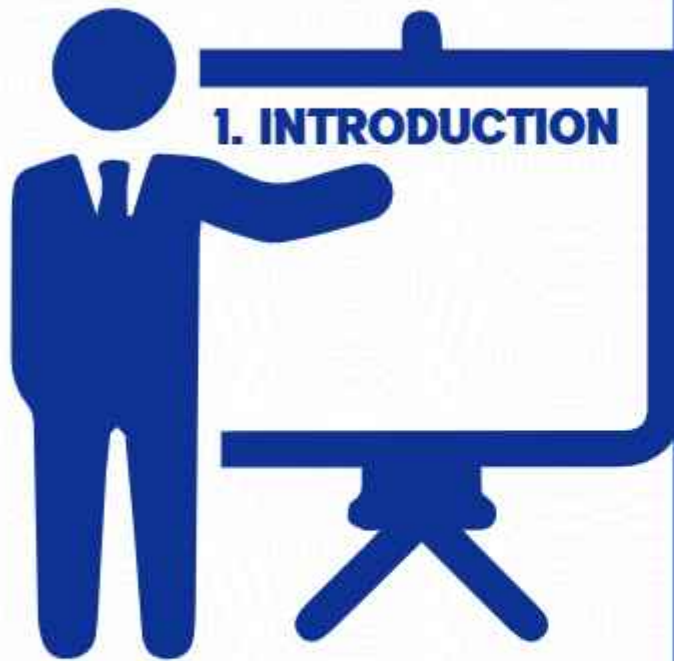
We also wish to acknowledge the Rwanda Biomedical Centre (RBC) for its technical leadership and coordination throughout the HIV response. RBC's expertise ensured that the content of this guide aligns with national HIV policies and communication strategies.

RRP+ further recognizes the valuable inputs from healthcare providers, peer educators, youth ambassadors, people living with HIV, and implementing partners who contributed their experiences and insights to make this guide practical and relevant to the Rwandan context.

Together, we reaffirm our shared commitment to the message of Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U) a message of hope, empowerment, and dignity for all people living with HIV in Rwanda.



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1.1. Rationale

Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U) is now a cornerstone message in the HIV response: people living with HIV who take antiretroviral therapy (ART) consistently and achieve an undetectable viral load do not transmit HIV sexually to their partners. Strong evidence of many years has confirmed that effective ART and sustained undetectable viral load eliminate the risk of sexual transmission and transform HIV into a manageable chronic condition.

UNAIDS states that people living with HIV who are on ART and have an undetectable viral load “cannot transmit HIV sexually,” a conclusion summarized in the global “Undetectable = Untransmittable” explainer and subsequent communications. UNAIDS further emphasizes that this message is life-changing for people living with HIV, restoring hope, intimacy, and the possibility of having children without transmitting HIV.

WHO’s consolidated HIV guidelines and recent scientific updates also explicitly endorse the U=U principle. WHO notes that people living with HIV who achieve and maintain an undetectable viral load have zero risk of sexually transmitting HIV.

Despite the scientific evidence, awareness and understanding of U=U remain uneven among healthcare providers, and people living with HIV. Misconceptions about transmission persist and contribute to stigma, fear, and unnecessary restrictions on sexual, reproductive, and family life. At the same time, U=U is a powerful tool to motivate HIV testing, early treatment initiation, adherence, and retention in care, and to advance human rights and dignity for people living with HIV.

Together, UNAIDS and WHO have issued joint statements with national governments (for example, in Thailand) explicitly endorsing U=U as a public health and human-rights approach to HIV prevention.

UNAIDS. Undetectable = Untransmittable. 20 July 2018. “The evidence is now clear that people living with HIV with an undetectable viral load cannot transmit HIV sexually.” Available at: <https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2018/july/undetectable-untransmittable>

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U). August 19 2024. “A person living with HIV who is on treatment and maintains an undetectable viral load has zero risk of transmitting HIV to their sexual partners.” Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/global-hiv/tb/php/our-approach/undetectable-untransmittable.html>

UNAIDS. Undetectable = Untransmittable — Feature Story. 20 July 2018. Available from: <https://www.unaids.org/en/resources/presscentre/featurestories/2018/july/undetectable-untransmittable>

Consolidated guidelines on differentiated HIV testing services. Geneva: World Health Organization; 2024. Licence: CC BY-NC-SA 3.0 IGO.

Coyne R, et al. “Awareness, Understanding and HIV Stigma in Response to a Protection-Framed U=U Message” — *PLoS ONE*. 2022. 17(10): e0275126. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9640424/>

Georgiadis N, et al. “A Cross-Population Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of U=U Awareness and Acceptance” — *Pathogens*. 2025. 14(7):673. Available at: <https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0817/14/7/673>

Tedese BK. “Lack of Knowledge and Understanding of Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U): Awareness of U = U has been shown to reduce anxiety and stigma, promote timely HIV testing, enhance treatment adherence, and improve viral suppression.” *Journal of the International AIDS Society*. 2025. Available: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/23259582251370236>

Ministry of Public Health of Thailand; Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS); World Health Organization. Joint statement: People living with HIV with an undetectable viral load cannot transmit HIV sexually. Bangkok, Thailand; 21 February 2020. Available from: https://cdn.who.int/media/docs/default-source/sears/hiv-hepatitis/joint-moph-unaids-who-uu.pdf?sfvrsn=8378cd0_2

Rwanda has also promoted the U=U message in its HIV response, through a campaign launched in collaboration with partners, which rely on people living with HIV and community-based peer educators to disseminate U=U, especially among serodiscordant couples.

Around the world, communities of people living with HIV, civil-society organizations, and governments have integrated U=U into their HIV responses:

Global Prevention Access Campaign (PAC): Since 2016, PAC has led the U=U movement, with more than 1,100 organizations from 100+ countries signing on as U=U community partners. They use U=U in campaigns, clinic materials, social media, and peer support to fight stigma and improve treatment uptake

Canada: Countries such as Canada and others have implemented mass-media and digital U=U campaigns featuring testimonies of people living with HIV to normalize undetectable viral load and reduce fear of transmission

Cambodia: Cambodia has developed a national U=U communication strategy, integrating U=U messages into facility-based counselling, community outreach, and stigma-reduction efforts

Europe: Many clinics and community organizations globally now use U=U in adherence clubs, key-population programmes, serodiscordant couple counselling, and youth support groups, showing that U=U can strengthen trust in services and support long-term engagement in care .

Drawing on these experiences, The U=U guide is therefore intended to:

- Provide clear, evidence-based information on the science of U=U;
 - Standardize how U=U is communicated in clinical, community, and public-health settings;
 - Support health workers and community actors to give accurate, non-stigmatizing counselling; and
- Position U=U as an integral part of the strategy to
- achieve and sustain HIV epidemic control, including the 95-95-95 targets and beyond.

Sebiti D. Rwanda launches WHO campaign to improve HIV/AIDS treatment. *KT Press*. 1 Oct 2021. Available at: <https://www.ktpress.rw/2021/10/rwanda-launches-who-campaign-to-improve-hiv-aids-treatment/>

Prevention Access Campaign. U = U Community Partners [Internet]. July 31 2025. Available from: <https://www.preventionaccess.org/community>

Public Health Agency of Canada. Preventing HIV transmission: Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U) — Communication tips for health professionals. Ottawa: PHAC; 2023 Dec 5. Available from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/publications/diseases-conditions/preventing-hiv-transmission-undetectable-equals-untransmittable.html>

National Centre for HIV/AIDS, Dermatology & STDs (NCHADS), Kingdom of Cambodia: Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS). Communication Strategy and Approaches for a Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U) Campaign in Cambodia. 2021-2025. Phnom Penh: NCHADS; 2021. Available from: <https://www.nchads.gov.kh/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/UU-Campaign-Strategy-Printing-version.pdf>

Prevention Access Campaign. Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U) Strategic Toolkit. 2023 Feb. Available from: <https://www.preventionaccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/CDC-UU-Toolkit-Feb-2023.pdf>

1.2. The Meaning of U=U

U=U stands for “Undetectable = Untransmittable.” It means that when a person living with HIV takes antiretroviral treatment (ART) correctly and achieves an undetectable viral load (so low that it cannot be measured by standard tests), they cannot sexually transmit HIV to their partners. The undetectable viral load as per the Rwanda HIV guidelines is defined as VL results under 20 or 40 copies/ml depending on testing platform used (Roche COBAS4800/6800 and Abbott m2000sp). It does not mean the virus is fully cleared from the body or someone is cured from HIV .

1.3. Evidence behind U=U

Studies including HIV Prevention Trials Network (HPTN052) ; Partners of People on ART – A New Evaluation of Risks (PARTNER) ; Opposites Attract ; and PARTNER2 proved that people living with HIV who take antiretroviral treatment (ART) and achieve undetectable viral load cannot sexually transmit the virus to their partners. These studies followed thousands of HIV-serodiscordant couples both heterosexual and same-sex over many years. Even after more than 160,000 sex acts without condoms or Pre-Exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), not a single case of HIV transmission occurred when the partner living with HIV had an undetectable viral load. This scientific evidence confirms that adherence to HIV treatment and achieving undetectable viral load is a highly effective way to prevent sexual transmission.

1.4. The Power of U=U

U=U is life-changing because it shows that HIV treatment not only keeps people healthy but also completely prevents sexual transmission of HIV. This helps reduce fear, stigma, and discrimination, allowing PLHIV to build relationships, have families, and live full lives without worry of passing on the virus. U=U also encourages people to get tested, start treatment early, and stay on treatment, which strengthens both individual health and public health.

Guidelines for HIV prevention, treatment and care in Rwanda, 2022

Cohen, M.S., Chen, Y.Q., McCauley, M., Gamble, M.C., Hosseinipour, M.C., Kumarasami, N., ... for the HPTN 052 study team. (2016). Antiretroviral therapy for the prevention of HIV-1 transmission. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 375(9), 830-839. DOI:10.1056/NEJMoa1600593

Rodger, A.J., Cambiano, V., Bruun, T., Verneze, P., Collins, S., Lunzen, J., ... for the PARTNER study group (2016). Sexual activity without condoms and risk of HIV transmission in serodifferent couples when the HIV-positive partner is using suppressive antiretroviral therapy. *Journal of the American Medical Association*, 316(2):171-81. DOI:10.1001/jama.2016.5148

avinton, B.R., Pinto, A.N., Phenuphak, N., Grinsstein, B., Prestage, G.P., Zablotska-Vfencs, I.B., ...Grulich, A. (2018). Viral suppression and HIV transmission in serodiscordant male couples: an international, prospective, observational, cohort study. *Lancet*, 5(8), 438-447. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-3018\(18\)30132-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-3018(18)30132-2)

Rodger, A.J., Cambiano, V., Bruun, T., Verneze, P., Collins, S., Degen, O., & ... for the PARTNER study group. (2019). Risk of HIV transmission through condomless sex in serodifferent gay couples with the HIV-positive partner taking suppressive antiretroviral therapy (PARTNER): final results of a multicenter prospective, observational study. *Lancet*, 393 (10189), 2428-2438. DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(19\)30418-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(19)30418-0)

1.5. U=U: A Tool Against HIV-related Stigma

U=U challenges the fear and misinformation that have long fueled HIV stigma. By proving that PLHIV who are on treatment and have an undetectable viral load cannot pass the virus sexually, U=U reassures both individuals and communities that HIV does not make someone “dangerous” or “a threat.” This scientific fact dismantles the myths that drive exclusion, fear in relationships, and rejection in social or professional settings. It empowers people living with HIV to see themselves as healthy, capable, and fully included members of society.

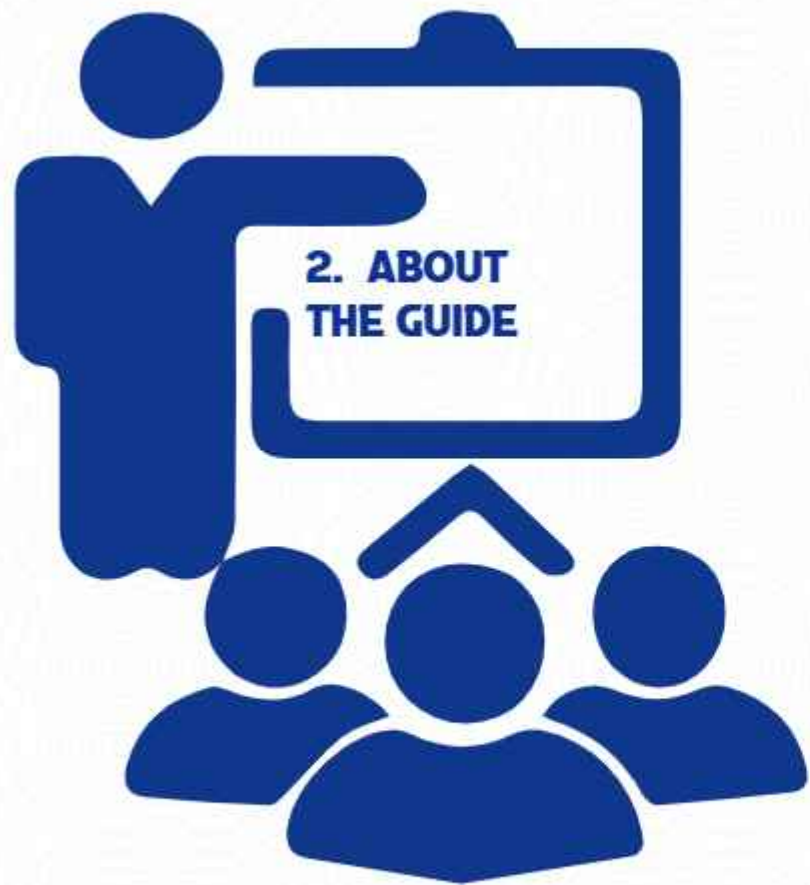
At the same time, U=U reduces discrimination by shifting how others view HIV. When families, partners, employers, and communities understand that HIV cannot be transmitted under effective treatment, they are less likely to impose harmful restrictions or act with prejudice. This promotes acceptance, respect, and dignity for PLHIV. Ultimately, U=U is not only a medical message it is a social justice tool that protects human rights, encourages openness, and creates a supportive environment for everyone affected by HIV.

1.6. PLHIV at the Heart of U=U

It is very important for PLHIV to lead U=U messaging because they know the reality of living with the virus better than anyone else. While PLHIV are the first bearers of U=U message they should play a role in ensuring they adhere to ARVs. When PLHIV share the message that U=U, it comes with lived experience, trust, and hope. Hearing directly from them helps communities believe the message, reduce fear, and understand that HIV does not stop someone from living a healthy, full life. In Rwanda, PLHIV, peer educators, are already close to the community. They can explain U=U in simple language, local culture, and everyday examples that people understand. Their leadership makes the message stronger and more relatable, encourages others to get tested and start treatment, and helps fight stigma. This is the reason why RRP+ should be at the center of U=U because the message becomes more powerful, human, and easier for everyone to accept.

1.7. Sharing the U=U message to save lives

Sharing the U=U message means helping people understand that when someone living with HIV takes treatment every day and achieves an undetectable viral load, they cannot pass the virus to their sexual partners. This is not only about science, but also a message that brings hope, dignity, and empowerment to people. By communicating U=U, we remind communities that HIV treatment saves lives, prevents transmission, and allows PLHIV to live long, healthy, and fulfilling lives.



2.1. Purpose of the Guide

The guide aims to help everyone: healthcare providers, peer educators, and people living with HIV (PLHIV) and program implementers learn together and take action to promote the message of Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U).

The aims of the guide are specifically to:

- Introduce the concept of “Undetectable = Untransmittable(U=U)” to communities, healthcare providers, peer educators and stakeholders as a core message of HIV prevention and treatment success.
- Increase awareness and understanding of U=U, ensuring that people living with HIV(PLHIV) and the general public know that an undetectable viral load means HIV cannot be sexually transmitted.
- Promote adherence to HIV treatment by emphasizing that taking antiretroviral therapy (ART) consistently leads to undetectable viral load and improved health outcomes.
- Raise awareness on the effectiveness of ART in preventing the transmission of HIV, reinforcing treatment as both care and prevention.
- Encourage regular viral load monitoring to confirm treatment success, maintain undetectable levels.

2.2. Who should use this guide?

The content of this guide is intended for all stakeholders involved in the dissemination and promotion of U=U within the HIV response.

- Primarily, healthcare providers will use the guide as they regularly engage with PLHIV at health facilities and within communities. They are encouraged to integrate U=U messages into routine education sessions (IEC), both at facility and community levels.
- Peer educators, Youth ambassadors will also benefit from the guide as they facilitate support groups, helping their peers to correctly and consistently adhere to HIV treatment through the promotion of U=U.
- In addition, program managers can draw on the guide when conducting trainings for diverse populations, using various communication channels such as pamphlets, social media platforms, and other community outreach tools. Journalists, social media influencers, radio/TV presenters, and community media platforms. They may also use this guide to help amplify U=U messages widely through mass communication channels.
- Religious leaders and teachers can also use the guide as they play an important role in reinforcing U=U, helping to reduce stigma and promote supportive environments.

2.3. How to use this guide

Use this guide to deliver accurate, consistent U=U messages across all levels of HIV response. Mainly, Healthcare providers, peer educators, Youth ambassadors and PLHIV networks, should apply it in consultations, education sessions, and support groups, while program managers and media platforms can adapt it for trainings and public communication.

The U=U message should be delivered clearly, simply, and consistently by everyone involved in HIV response from healthcare providers in clinics, to peer educators and PLHIV networks in communities, to program managers and media platforms at national level. Using local language, relatable examples, and trusted voices makes the message easier for people to accept and believe.

**3. KEY
MESSAGES AROUND
UNDETECTABLE=
UNTRANSMITTABLE**



3. Key messages around Undetectable=Untransmittable

This section provides key messages to help people communicate effectively about the concept of U=U. These messages are designed for use across multiple platforms, including clinical settings, community meetings, websites, prevention materials, and social media.

Although some of the messages may appear similar, each one highlights a slightly different tone, focus, or communication objective. People are encouraged to use the messages according to their intended purpose, the needs of the targeted audience, and the context of delivery.

- **Social media:** Use short, simple statements with one or two key points to quickly capture attention.
- **Clinical settings:** Use longer, evidence-based messages that provide clarity, reassurance, and support patient understanding.
- **Community meetings:** Use inclusive, motivational language that encourages collective understanding and reduces stigma.
- **Websites and prevention materials:** Use clear, informative content that balances scientific accuracy with accessibility.

By applying these key messages appropriately, it is ensured that U=U is consistently communicated in a way that is accurate, relatable, and impactful.



•Social Media Version (short, attention-grabbing):

"U=U: When HIV is undetectable, it's Untransmittable. Treatment saves lives and stops transmission."



•Clinical Setting Version (detailed, supportive):

"If you take your HIV treatment every day at consistent time and your viral load becomes undetectable, you cannot pass HIV to your sexual partners. This is known as U=U. With consistent treatment, you can stay healthy and protect your loved ones."



•Community Meeting Version (inclusive, motivational):

U=U means that when someone living with HIV takes treatment and becomes undetectable, they cannot pass the virus to others. This is a message of hope for families and communities it shows that treatment works, stigma must end, and together we can stop HIV."



•Website/Prevention Materials Version (balanced, informative):

U=U is a proven scientific fact: when PLHIV take treatment as prescribed and achieve an undetectable viral load, they do not transmit the virus sexually. This knowledge helps reduce fear and stigma, encourages more people to get tested and treated, and supports healthier, longer lives.

3.1. U=U for everyone

Message 1. Stay Undetectable. Stay Untransmittable. U=U: Understand. Use. Uphold

UNDERSTAND	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I am Undetectable if my viral load is ≤ 20 OR 40 copies/ml and cannot be detected by standard laboratory tests.• An undetectable viral load is certain when I comply and adhere consistently to my ARVs.• I am Untransmittable when an undetectable viral load prevents the sexual transmission of HIV
USE	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I am Untransmittable when I use ARV treatment as prevention
UPHOLD	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I am Untransmittable when I use ARV treatment as prevention



Message 2: ACT- to stay undetectable and Untransmittable.

- A Adhere** to treatment by taking your ART daily as prescribed.
- C Check** your viral load regularly (as recommended) at the health facility.
- T Trust** your care providers and stay engaged with your health by keeping clinic appointments regularly.



3.2. U=U and women living with HIV

The prevention of sexual transmission of HIV through U=U applies equally to women as it does to everyone else. When a woman or her sexual partner maintains an undetectable viral load, sexual intimacy can be enjoyed without fear of HIV transmission.

However, it is important to recognize that U=U, as currently defined, addresses sexual transmission only.

Pregnancy and childbirth: Research shows that women who begin ART before pregnancy and maintain an undetectable viral load throughout pregnancy can give birth to healthy, HIV-negative babies.

Breastfeeding: Scientific evidence suggests that the risk of HIV transmission through breastfeeding among women on ART with undetectable viral load is extremely low.

Message 3: T.A.P to protect yourself, your partner and your baby Test. Adhere. Protect.

- T Test:** Know your HIV status early. Every woman should get tested before and during pregnancy so they can start ART if positive. "U = U starts with knowing your status"
- A Adhere:** Take your ART every day to reach and maintain an undetectable viral load before conception, during pregnancy, and throughout breastfeeding period. "Staying adherent keeps you undetectable"
- P Protect:** When you are undetectable, you protect yourself (you are healthy), your partner, and your baby



To better support TAP- Healthcare providers are encouraged to:

- o Identify women and adolescent girls living with HIV before conception
- o Ensure linkage to ART and adherence support as soon as possible
- o Understand pregnancy goals and support safe conception for women living with HIV and their partners in the ART clinic
- o Provide voluntary family planning options at the ART clinic, ideally or through referrals
- o Ensure undetectable viral load before conception
- o Educate women to ensure sustained undetectable viral load throughout the exposure period
- o Ensure Prophylaxis during birth and breastfeeding period should continue as recommended

Arkell C. HIV treatment and an undetectable viral load to prevent HIV transmission. Toronto: CATIE; 2019. Available from: <http://www.catie.ca/en/fact-sheets/transmission/hiv-viral-load-hiv-treatment-and-sexual-hiv-transmission> [accessed October 12, 2025]

National guidelines for HIV prevention, care and treatment, Edition 2022

Message 4. Consistent adherence protects sexual partners.

- When a woman living with HIV including female sex worker takes her ARVs every day and achieves an Undetectable viral load, she cannot transmit HIV to her sexual partners even through sex without a condom.
- While U = U stops HIV transmission, other prevention methods remain essential.
Message 5. U = U does not protect against pregnancy



Message 5. U = U does not protect against pregnancy

- U = U prevents HIV transmission but does not prevent pregnancy.
- Women who do not wish to become pregnant should use family planning methods such as condoms, injectables, implants, or pills, depending on personal choice and counseling from a healthcare provider.



Message 6. U = U does not replace the prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) interventions.

- Even if a mother is undetectable, babies still need prophylaxis (ARV drops or syrup) after birth to ensure complete protection against HIV.
- Mothers should continue PMTCT follow-up and adhere to ARVs while take all prescribed steps, including infant prophylaxis, early infant testing, and safe breastfeeding guidance.



3.3. U=U in people injecting drugs

Message 7. Undetectable stops HIV through sex, not through needles.

- Like all other groups, people who inject drugs do not transmit HIV through sexual activity when their viral load is undetectable
- Never share needles, syringes, or any injecting equipment with anyone, because while some research indicates that having an undetectable viral load may reduce the risk of HIV transmission through sharing injection equipment, there is not enough scientific evidence to confirm that the risk is eliminated.
- Even if your viral load is undetectable and HIV cannot be passed through sex, sharing injection equipment can still transmit HIV or other infections such as hepatitis B, hepatitis C.
- To prevent HIV transmission, always use new, sterile needles and equipment every time you inject, and dispose of them safely after one use.

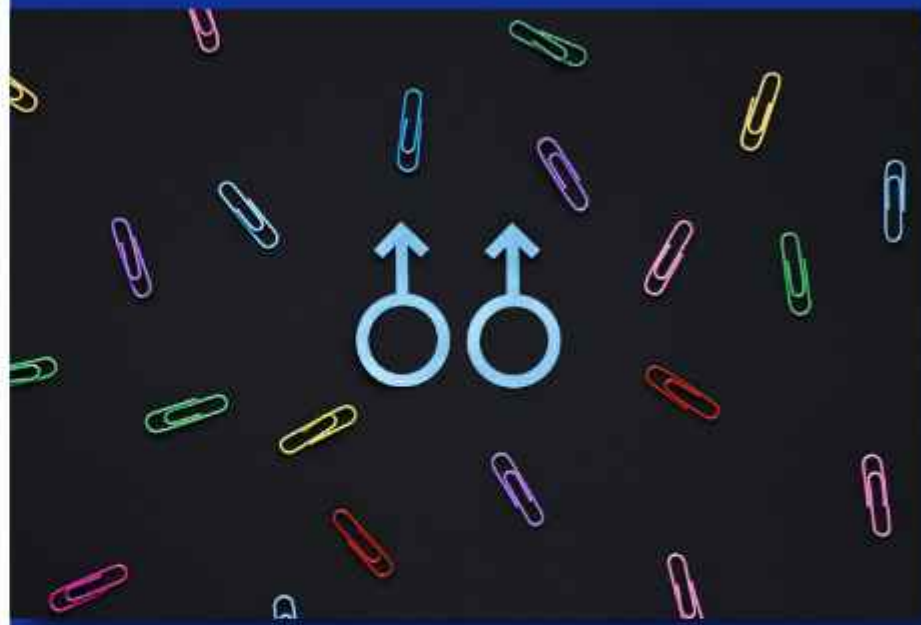


Arnell C. HIV prevention for people who inject drugs: new biomedical approaches and time-honoured strategies. Toronto: CATIE; 2017. Available from: <https://www.catie.ca/en/pif/spring-2017/hiv-prevention-people-who-inject-drugs-new-biomedical-approaches-and-time-honoured-s> [accessed October 20, 2025].

3.4. U=U and Men Who have Sex with Men

Message 8. U=U applies equally to all PLHIV, including MSM

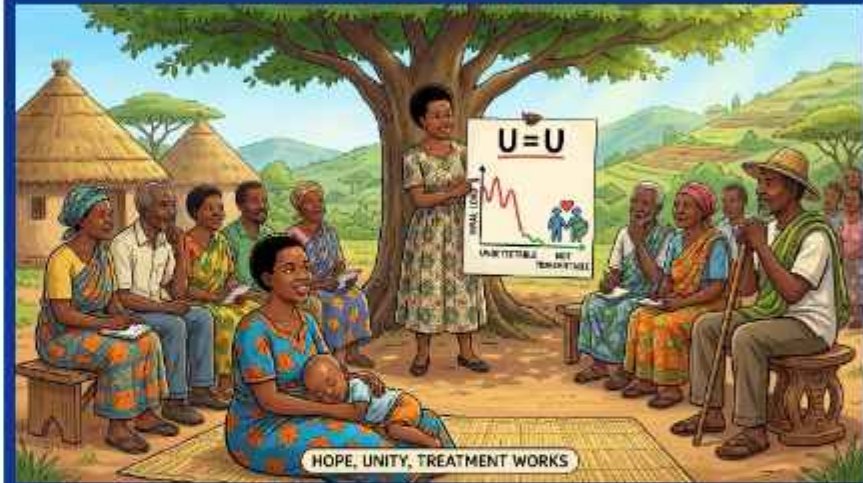
Scientific evidence demonstrates that U=U, which prevents sexual transmission of HIV, applies to all populations, including MSM. When MSM living with HIV are diagnosed, initiated on ARVs, and supported to maintain sustained treatment adherence, they achieve undetectable viral load and effectively prevent HIV transmission to sexual partners, and contribute to efforts to end HIV transmission.



3.5. U=U prevents Stigma and discrimination

Message 9. U = U Ends Stigma and Promotes Equality

- U = U helps end stigma and discrimination by showing that PLHIV who are on effective treatment and have an undetectable viral load are healthy and cannot transmit HIV to others.
- The U= U message removes fear and promotes respect, inclusion, and equality for everyone.



3.6. Understanding the Limits and Complements of U = U



Message 10. U=U Works, other Protection measures still matter

- U=U does not protect against other sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- U = U does not protect against pregnancy
- U = U does not replace the prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) interventions
- U = U complements and does not replace other HIV prevention methods
- It is important to note that U=U is not a cure. While the virus may not be transmitted to sex partners, it is still present in the body



Rodger AJ et al. Risk of HIV transmission through condomless sex in serodifferent gay couples with the HIV-positive partner taking suppressive ART (PARTNER 2 study): final results. *The Lancet*. 2019;393(10189):2428–2438. DOI: 10.1016/S0140-6736(19)30428-0

3.7. Staying Undetectable Keeps You Healthy and Protects Others

	Keeping your HIV undetectable helps you live a long, healthy, and fulfilling life.
	To reach and maintain an undetectable level, take your antiretroviral (ARV) treatment every day exactly as prescribed.
	It usually takes about six months of consistent treatment for HIV to become undetectable in your blood.
	Once your viral load is undetectable and you keep taking your medication as prescribed, you cannot pass HIV through sex.
	If you stop taking your HIV medicines, your viral load can increase again within one to two weeks, and you may be able to pass HIV to your sexual partners.
	Always use condoms correctly and consistently to prevent other sexually transmitted infections OR pregnancy.

3.8. Role of the Health Care Workers

Health care workers play a central role in making Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U) a reality in their communities by:

- **Encouraging community members to know their HIV** status through regular and voluntary testing.
- **Supporting people living with HIV** to stay on treatment and adhere to their ARVs every day.
- **Regularly monitoring viral load** to ensure people on treatment achieve and maintain undetectable levels.
- Educating PLHIV on the VL results, their meaning in order to motivate them keep their adherence.
- **Promoting healthy living** among people living with HIV, including good nutrition, mental well-being, and positive lifestyles.
- **Creating an enabling and friendly environment** at health facilities where everyone feels respected, supported, and free from stigma and discrimination.

4. U=U FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

As you share information about U=U, you may encounter questions that go beyond the basics. The following section presents a collection of frequently asked questions and common concerns, along with suggested responses. These are designed to help address doubts, build confidence in U=U, and dispel myths or misconceptions.

Q1. Promoting U=U is vital, but there is a risk that some may say they are undetectable when they are not. What steps can be taken to prevent this and ensure U=U is shared truthfully and responsibly?

- There is always a risk that some people may be unclear about their current viral load status. For example, a person who once received an undetectable result may assume they remain undetectable even if their status has changed. This highlights the importance of clear messaging on continual viral load monitoring and consistent adherence to HIV treatment in order to stay undetectable.
- It is important to remember that maintaining an undetectable viral load, and using treatment as prevention, is largely the responsibility of people living with HIV. At the same time, HIV-negative individuals should feel empowered to use self-directed prevention methods such as PrEP or condoms.

- In the context of index testing, healthcare providers should be encouraged and trained to share this guidance during post-test counseling with HIV-negative partners in Sero discordant relationships. Using additional prevention methods does not diminish the value of U=U, nor does it reduce our strong scientific confidence in treatment as prevention.

Q2. Can healthcare providers recommend condomless sex for Sero discordant couples when the partner living with HIV has an undetectable viral load, the couple is monogamous, and no other risk factors are present?

- If a couple is in a mutually monogamous relationship and there is no sharing of needles, the science of U=U (Undetectable = Untransmittable) supports condomless sex as a safe option. When the partner living with HIV achieves and consistently maintains an undetectable viral load, they cannot transmit HIV to their HIV-negative partner during sex.
- This recommendation should always be accompanied by counseling on the importance of strict medication adherence to remain undetectable. Couples should also be reminded—that the protective benefit of U=U can disappear quickly—sometimes within just a few days—if the partner living with HIV stops taking their treatment

Q3. Does U=U also apply to mothers who are breastfeeding?

For breastfeeding, the situation is different. Research shows that when mothers living with HIV are on treatment and undetectable, the risk of passing HIV to their baby through breast milk is very low, but not zero. A few cases of transmission have been reported, even when mothers were undetectable.

Because of this, the guidelines recommend:

- Daily treatment without interruption the most important way for mothers to protect themselves and their babies.
- Regular viral load monitoring – to make sure the mother stays undetectable.
- Routine infant testing – so any infection can be identified and treated early.
- Counseling

Q4. When counseling a client newly initiated on ART, after how long of consistent treatment and adherence can they be safely advised that condomless sex will not transmit HIV?

A person's viral load is considered "durably undetectable" when every viral load test remains undetectable for at least six months after the first undetectable result. Most people reach their first undetectable result within 3–6 months of starting ART.

This means that, in practice, most individuals need to stay on treatment for 9–12 months before they can be considered durably undetectable. At that point, they may be advised that condomless sex does not transmit HIV.

Q5. How can one reach the status of undetectable and Untransmittable?

- a. At least two (2) consecutive viral load results of less than 20copies/ml over a six-month (6) period.
- b. Continuing to be on Antiretroviral therapy even after the viral load is undetectable,
- c. Monitoring of VL as recommended while on treatment
- d. By seeing a health care provider regularly and taking antiretroviral therapy (ART) as prescribed, nearly everyone with HIV can become and remain undetectable.

Q6. When U=U Should not be recommended?

- a. Currently, there is no sufficient evidence to suggest that suppressed HIV viral load will prevent HIV from being transmitted when sharing needles by people who inject drugs
- b. Cases of HIV transmission from breastfeeding have been reported even when the mother's viral load was undetectable in both blood and breast milk

Arkell C. HIV prevention for people who inject drugs: new biomedical approaches and time-honoured strategies. Toronto: CATIE; 2017. Available from: <https://www.catie.ca/en/pif/spring-2017/hiv-prevention-people-who-inject-drugs-new-biomedical-approaches-and-time-honoured-s> [accessed October 20, 2025]

Q7. Does U=U apply to men who have sex with men (MSM)?

Yes. U=U applies equally to all people living with HIV, including men who have sex with men (MSM). Scientific evidence shows that when a person living with HIV is on effective antiretroviral therapy (ART) and maintains an undetectable viral load, they cannot sexually transmit HIV to their partners regardless of sexual orientation or type of sex (oral, vaginal, or anal) . . .

Kerrigan D, et al. Risk of HIV transmission to a sex partner if a person with HIV has undetectable viral load while taking suppressive ART (HARINEX 2 study): final results. *Thromb Haemostasis*. 2019;99(10):2426-2438. DOI: 10.1016/S0954-6792(19)30418-0

Bavinkov BA, et al. Viral suppression and HIV transmission in serodiscordant male couples in heterosexual partnership: a systematic cohort study (Opportunus Acquire). *The Lancet HIV*. 2018;2(8):e438-e447. DOI: 10.1016/S2662-8011(18)30132-2

5. CONCLUSION

The Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U) Messaging Guide reinforces that consistent HIV treatment leading to undetectable viral load not only preserves health but also prevents sexual transmission of HIV. It empowers people living with HIV to live free from stigma and discrimination, while guiding healthcare providers, peer educators, and communities to promote adherence, regular viral load monitoring, and accurate communication. U=U stands as both a scientific breakthrough and a message of dignity, equality, and hope in HIV response.

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