



HIV Undetectable = Untransmittable

Medication for treating HIV can eliminate the risk of sexual transmission. In August of 2019 the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) released a letter stating: "For ART (Antiretroviral Therapy), the science is strong and clear; the data show that the effectiveness for ART with viral suppression is estimated to be 100% for preventing sexual transmission of HIV. In other words, for persons taking ART as prescribed and achieving and maintaining viral suppression, there is effectively no risk of transmitting HIV through sex." This is known as Undetectable = Untransmittable, or U=U.

How does HIV treatment prevent HIV Transmission?

Antiretroviral medicines control HIV very effectively. They do not cure HIV or remove the virus from the body, but if taken every day, as prescribed, HIV medicines stop the virus from multiplying. This prevents the virus from damaging the immune system and stops sexual transmission to others.

What does undetectable mean

Undetectable means that the level of HIV in a person's blood is so low that it doesn't show up on a viral load test. Although HIV is still present in the person's body, the amount is so low that HIV cannot be transmitted to others through sex.

How do we know Undetectable = Untransmittable?

HPTN 052, Partner, and Opposites Attract were three recent studies that followed heterosexual couples and same sex male couples in which one partner was living with HIV and the other partner was HIV negative. In all three studies not one person living with HIV, who was undetectable, transmitted HIV to their HIV negative partner. The studies included over 34,000 instances of condomless anal sex among same sex male couples, and 36,000 instances of condomless vaginal or anal sex among heterosexual couples.

If I am HIV Negative, is it safe to have sex with someone who is living with HIV?

Studies have shown that a person living with HIV who has been undetectable for at least six months will not transmit HIV to a sexual partner. This is much safer than having sex with someone who does not know their HIV status, is living with HIV, and is not taking any antiretroviral medication.

If a sexual partner informs you they are living with HIV, and has an undetectable viral load, should we still wear condoms?

It is true that a person living with HIV that is undetectable will not transmit HIV even with condomless sex. However, taking HIV suppressive medications does not protect against other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) or unintended pregnancy. If you are unsure of your partner's HIV Status, the number of other partners they might have, or their ability to routinely take their medication to control their HIV, consider using condoms or taking PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis), a once a day medication that prevents HIV by up to 99%.

If I am on HIV medications, should my partner be on PrEP?

This is a discussion to have with your partner. Couples share the responsibility for each other's health. If you are undetectable, your partner does not need to be on PrEP to prevent HIV. However, your partner may want to be proactive regarding their own health and choose to be on PrEP. Other reasons a partner may choose to be on PrEP and/or wear condoms would be if either of you have other sexual partners, if you struggle to remember taking your HIV medications, or simply if it helps either of you feel more secure in your sex lives.

What else helps prevent HIV?

Routine testing for HIV and STIs helps people know their status and is an opportunity to enter into care early should a person learn they are living with HIV. A negative HIV test gives a person the opportunity to discuss other prevention methods in order to help stay negative. Testing for STIs is important because many STIs do not show symptoms and they can increase a person's chance of acquiring HIV. STIs can also lead to an increased viral load in a person living with HIV.