



# HIV treatment and ‘treatment as prevention’

## How is HIV treated?

- If you’re diagnosed with HIV, your doctor will talk to you about starting treatment.
- HIV treatments are called antiretrovirals. These are tablets, taken daily.
- It is recommended that people with HIV start HIV treatment as soon as possible after being diagnosed with HIV. This is to reduce the amount of the virus in the body as quickly as possible and limit the damage to the immune system.
- HIV treatment has very few side-effects for most people.
- People living with HIV who are on HIV treatment can now expect to live to the same age as people without HIV.

## How can I know whether the treatment is working?

- If you’re diagnosed with HIV, your doctor will arrange tests to check on the level of HIV in your blood. These are called viral load tests. They measure the amount or load of HIV in the blood.
- Viral load tests will be done when you first go onto HIV treatment, and again when you’ve been on treatment for a while. This is so that the doctor can check whether the HIV treatment is working properly.
- If the viral load has gone down, the treatment is working well.
- If the viral load is not going down, the doctor may change your medication.

## What happens without treatment?

- If HIV is not treated, the person’s HIV load will increase and damage their immune system. They may get very sick, often, with HIV-related illnesses. If people with HIV do not stay on treatment they will die earlier.
- A person who has a high HIV load can easily pass HIV on to their partners if they have sex without a condom, or if they share drug injecting equipment.



#### What's 'undetectable viral load'?

- HIV treatments cannot cure HIV, but treatment can reduce the amount of HIV in your blood to a point where it is undetectable in tests.

#### Can someone with an undetectable viral load pass HIV on to other people?

- No.
- While a person's HIV load is undetectable in tests, they cannot pass HIV on to other people. This means less worry for people with HIV about passing HIV on to sex partners.
- If you have HIV and you're told that your viral load is undetectable, it's important to keep getting your viral load tested every 6–12 months.
- It's also important to keep using condoms to protect against other STIs. STIs are very common in our community.

#### What's 'treatment as prevention'?

- As more people with HIV go onto treatment and get their viral load down to undetectable levels, there will be less transmission of HIV.
- This is called 'treatment as prevention' because improving access to treatment for people with HIV in our community has become a type of HIV prevention.

#### What's 'U=U'?

- You may see HIV posters at the clinic or posts online that talk about 'U=U'. This stands for 'Undetectable = Untransmissible'.
- The posters are to let the community know that HIV is untransmissible if the viral load is undetectable.

#### Don't be shame

- Diagnosed with HIV and want to know more about treatment and staying healthy? Ask your doctor!

*Let's look after our health and get tested for STIs and BBVs. If we all test and get treated, we can stop the spread of STIs and BBVs in our community.*