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Undetectable Equals Untransmittable: Building Hope and Ending HIV Stigma

Together, we can change the course of the HIV epidemic...one woman at a time.

#onewomanatatime

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What Is “U=U”?

When a person living with HIV is taking HIV drugs and their viral load has reached **undetectable** levels (not enough HIV in their bloodstream for a test to measure), that person *cannot transmit HIV to a partner who is HIV-negative*

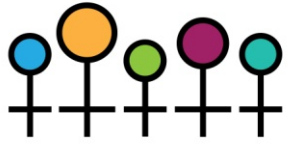
HIV community members, advocates, and experts refer to this as “*Undetectable Equals Untransmittable*” (“U=U”)



Treatment as Prevention (TasP)



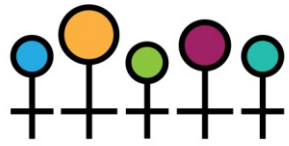
- Foundation of U=U
- Refers to ways we can use HIV treatment regimens to *lower risk of spreading HIV*
- For people living with HIV (HIV+):
 - Taking HIV drugs can reduce viral load
 - Blood, vaginal fluids, and/or semen (cum) is much less likely to transmit HIV to others
 - Mixed-status couples (one partner HIV+, one HIV-) who want to have babies are more likely to safely conceive "the old-fashioned way"



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How HIV Treatment Makes U=U

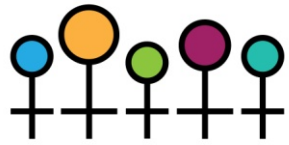
- Chance of passing on any virus has to do with **amount of virus** (viral load) in body fluids
- HIV drugs prevent virus from **reproducing** (making copies of itself)
- When an HIV treatment regimen works ...
 - HIV is **unable** to reproduce
 - HIV will not infect new cells in your body
 - **Viral load remains low**, which means you are...
 - More likely to have a healthy immune system
 - **Less likely to transmit HIV**



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How HIV Treatment Makes U=U

- HIV drugs **cannot cure HIV**
 - Even when viral load is **undetectable**, there are still 'resting' or latent HIV cells in certain areas (**reservoirs**) of your body (e.g., gut, brain, bone marrow)
- ... but having an undetectable viral load means there is **barely a trace of virus** in body fluids that transmit HIV
 - Blood, vaginal fluids, semen

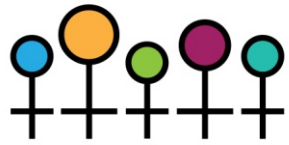


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The Research Behind U=U

The "Swiss Consensus Statement" (2008)

- Group of HIV care providers in Switzerland produced a paper aimed at other doctors in their country
- Agreed that an HIV+ person who had had an undetectable viral load for at least 6 months on HIV treatment had a **negligible risk** (so small or unimportant that it is not worth considering) of transmitting HIV
 - Based on new data and their clients' experiences

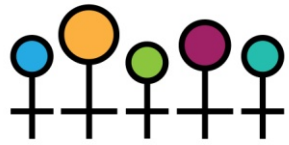


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The Research Behind U=U

HPTN 052 (2011)

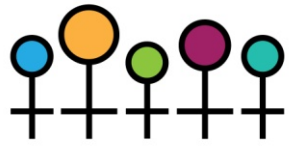
- Large study - more than 1,000 mostly heterosexual, mixed-status couples
- Showed that partners living with HIV and taking HIV treatment could reduce chance that their HIV-negative partners would acquire HIV by up to 96%
- ***Only 3 cases*** of HIV transmission in study group
 - In each case, partner living with HIV had detectable viral load
 - Their HIV drugs had not yet started working properly, or had stopped working



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The Research Behind U=U

- HPTN 052 *changed HIV prevention*
 - Put an additional tool - treatment for people living with HIV - in prevention toolbox
- However, *information not well known or understood* outside of HIV advocate and expert circles
 - Mainstream media accounts of this news was often confusing, misleading, loaded with HIV stigma
- Many *people living with HIV were not aware* of this exciting development



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The Research Behind U=U

PARTNER (2016)

- Looked at HIV transmission risk in heterosexual and gay mixed-status couples
 - Partners living with HIV took HIV treatment, had undetectable viral loads
- After 58,000 instances of sex, among 1,166 couples who were not using condoms, ***zero cases of HIV acquisition***
- Results of PARTNER and follow-up results of HPTN 052 published in mid-2016
 - Still confusion, misinformation, silence around topic

The U=U Campaign

- Launched by health equity program [Prevention Access Campaign](#) (PAC) in early 2016
- A project led by people living with HIV
- Unites global community of HIV advocates, activists, researchers, community partners
- Mission is to clarify and share the fact that *people living with HIV, who are on effective HIV treatment, do not transmit HIV when they have sex*
- Tags for social media
 - #UequalsU
 - #ScienceNotStigma



If your viral load is undetectable, it means you can't pass HIV to others. Treatment = Prevention! on.nyc.gov/staysure #PlaySure #TasP



UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE
НЕДЕТЕКТАБИЛНО = НЕПРЕНОСЛИВО

ЗАЕДНО ПОСРЕДСТВО ЗА ЗАЩИТА НА ПУТЕТО НА ЖИВИТЕ СО ХИВ - ЗАЕДНО ПОСРЕДСТВО ЗА ЗАЩИТА

U=U

Undetectable = Untransmittable
non rilevabile = non trasmissibile

#UequalsU

U=U

UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE

A PERSON LIVING WITH HIV WHO HAS AN UNDETECTABLE VIRAL LOAD DOES NOT TRANSMIT THE VIRUS TO THEIR PARTNERS.

The International AIDS Society is proud to endorse the U=U consensus statement of the Prevention Access Campaign.

nam aidsmap

HIV & AIDS - sharing knowledge, changing lives

"The scientific evidence is clear. Someone whose HIV is undetectable does not pose an infection risk to their sexual partners."

For information on HIV you can rely on: www.aidsmap.com

U=U Undetectable Equals Untransmittable

INDETECTABLE SIGNIFICA INTRANSMISIBILE

U=U

UNDETECTABLE EQUALS UNTRANSMITTABLE

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NEWS & EVENTS HIV INFO

Risk Testing Treat

Getting your viral load down to undetectable also helps prevent new infections. Studies show that people living with HIV who are on treatment and have a suppressed viral load do not transmit HIV to HIV-negative sex partners. In other words, if you are living with HIV and have an undetectable viral load, you don't have to worry about passing HIV to your sex partners. For many people, being undetectable offers a renewed sense of freedom, brings less anxiety around sex, and reduces stigma associated with HIV.

San Francisco AIDS Foundation

U=U

#LOVE POSITIVE

exaequo

AIDES

IT STARTS WITH ME I WON'T PASS ON HIV.

I know that someone doing well on HIV medication can't pass it on. If everybody does that, let us own our lives.

Get tested. Stay motivated. Find what works for you.

NIET DETECTEERBAAR BETEKEN NIET OVERDRAAGBAAR

n=n

An undetectable viral load means we can't pass HIV to our partners.

undetectable = untransmittable

nycHealthy @nycHealthy

If your viral load is undetectable, you can't pass HIV to your partners. Treatment = Prevention! staysure #PlaySure #Tas

WE STAY SURE

HIV TREATMENT = PREVENTION

#UequalsU United

U=U

UNDETECTABLE MEANS UNINFECTIOUS

[+u]

BODY POSITIVE NEW ZEALAND

UNDETECTABLES

HOUSING WORKS

HOW DO YOU BECOME UNDETECTABLE?

You don't need to be a superhero to do something powerful for yourself and your community.

By regularly taking the right medicine, you can lower the amount of HIV in your blood (aka your viral load) to become undetectable. A low viral load is a good thing!

UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE!

People who are undetectable cannot transmit the virus to others. When you're undetectable, you both protect your own health and prevent new HIV infections. And many experts agree!

This doesn't mean you no longer have HIV—it means that by continuing your plan of treatment, you can live with HIV by managing your health on your own terms.

PEOPLE WITH HIV ON EFFECTIVE TREATMENT DO NOT SEXUALLY TRANSMIT HIV

ACT UP DUBLIN

UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE

My viral load is undetectable that means I can't "sexually" pass it on to my "FRIENDS"

Undetectable = Untransmittable

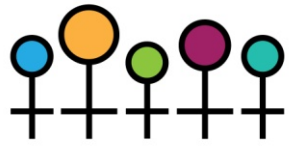
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HIV BELIRLENEMİYORSA BULAŞTIRILAMAZ. MIT

U=U

UNDETECTABLE UNTRANSMITTABLE

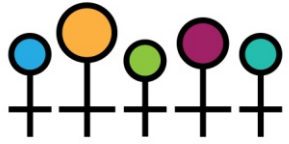
AIDS CARES



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Community and Medical Experts Agree

- 2016: U=U campaign released first-ever **global consensus statement** confirming science behind U=U
- >280 partners comprised of HIV experts, advocacy groups, service organizations, departments of health from 34 countries have endorsed U=U message (as of 7/11/17)
- Statement translated into 11 languages (as of 7/11/17)
 - The Well Project proudly endorsed consensus statement in April 2017
- Partners share info in ways that work for their communities
- Part of a strategy to break down HIV **stigma**; provide **hope**; **improve** lives of people living with HIV; move closer to ending HIV as a worldwide epidemic

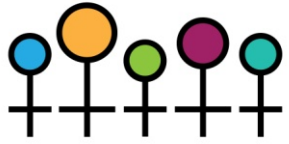


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Why Didn't I Know About This?

Shifts in attitudes, beliefs, behaviors take time

- For decades, condom use held up as only sure way to stop spread of HIV
- Condom use often encouraged through campaigns and activities based in fear of contact with HIV
- Undetectable viral load as a barrier to HIV transmission has been a difficult message for many to accept
- STIs and unwanted pregnancies remain important issues
 - Condoms prevent these; HIV treatment as prevention does not

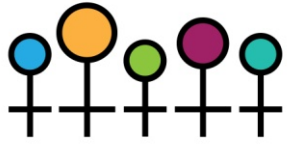


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Why Didn't I Know About This?

Intersectional forms of stigma affect whether U=U message is delivered

- People living with or vulnerable to HIV are often the same people whose sexuality carries stigma and judgment
 - E.g., transgender people, women of color, older women, young women, people living in poverty
 - Freedom to enjoy their sexual lives is often limited, not celebrated
 - Recognizing that TasP can make them unlikely to pass the virus to their partners may help with stigma and judgment
- Recent study found that almost 40% of women studied had not been told about U=U by providers
- In another study, participants vastly overestimated their own transmission risk

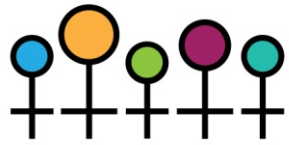


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Important U=U Issues for Women

Relationship Power Dynamics

- Part of how HIV epidemic continues to flourish among women globally
 - Women often cannot demand that their partners use condoms due to uneven power dynamics, fear of violence
 - May follow that women are unable to ask about their partners' treatment status or viral load
 - Partners may not honor a woman's request to use condoms or other barriers based on their undetectable viral load
- ***More research and insight is needed*** into ways U=U may be affected by partner power dynamics for women

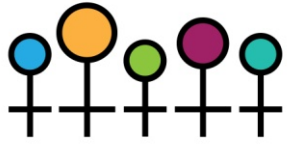


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Important U=U Issues for Women

Breastfeeding

- While HIV treatment can decrease HIV transmission through breast milk, there may still be some risk
 - Having undetectable viral load in blood may not guarantee undetectable viral load in breast milk
 - Other factors that affect HIV transmission through breastfeeding
 - E.g., **mastitis** (breast infection that can occur in breastfeeding mothers) can increase viral load before a woman knows she has it
 - In places without refrigeration or safe water, the risk from formula feeding with unsafe water - and the immune benefits of breastfeeding - may outweigh HIV risk

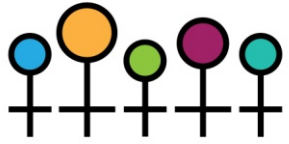


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Important U=U Issues for Women

Breastfeeding

- In high-resource areas with safe water, breastfeeding isn't recommended for women living with HIV
 - Experts on HIV and women's health divided as to whether or not this should be the case in U=U era
- Some providers suggest:
 - That women be given all information to make their own choice
 - Be supported to continue taking their HIV treatment
 - Be counseled on reducing potential harms of breastfeeding if they choose to do so

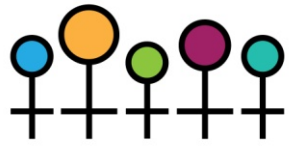


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Important U=U Issues for Women

HIV Criminalization

- As of April 2016, 72 countries and >30 U.S. states had laws making it a crime for a person living with HIV to do things (e.g., consensual sex) that are not crimes for HIV- people
- These laws build HIV stigma and discrimination into the legal system
- Do not take into account the realities of living with HIV in the era of U=U
 - U=U does not yet change status of existing laws

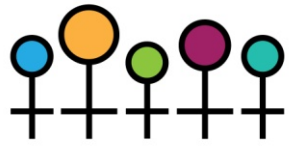


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Important U=U Issues for Women

HIV Criminalization

- In opposing these laws, it is important not to stigmatize or criminalize those that have detectable viral loads
- Women, especially, may have a harder time getting their viral loads to undetectable, for reasons including:
 - Being more likely to be diagnosed later in life than men
 - Prioritizing the health of others over their own
 - Higher rates of violence, poverty, instability that come with these social determinants of health that make it hard to be consistent with medication
- ***Criminalizing people based on HIV status is never appropriate, regardless of viral load***



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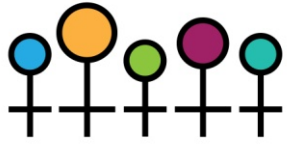
The Bottom Line

- Increasing awareness that having an undetectable viral load means that people living with HIV will not transmit the virus can have a ***dramatic impact on public and personal perceptions of HIV***
- HIV stigma = biggest barrier to ending HIV epidemic
- Important to break down stigma wherever possible by providing access to information, community support, advocacy -- all of which build hope
- U=U has the potential to address all kinds of HIV stigma

The Bottom Line

While researchers must continue to examine promise and impact of treatment as prevention, ***the science that is currently available strongly supports U=U***

We need to make sure that ***all people living with HIV, or vulnerable to becoming HIV+, have access to this life-altering information,*** so that they can make informed decisions about their own sexual health and lives



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Learn More!

- To learn more about this topic, and for links to articles featuring more details, please read the full fact sheet on this topic:
 - [Undetectable Equals Untransmittable: Building Hope and Ending HIV](#)
- Visit [Prevention Access Campaign](#) **#UequalsU**
- For more fact sheets and to connect to our community of women living with HIV, visit:
 - www.thewellproject.org
 - www.facebook.com/thewellproject
 - www.twitter.com/thewellproject

Additional Resources

- [U=U: Undetectable = Untransmittable](#) (Video)
 - *from Prevention Access Campaign*
- [If I Am Undetectable I Can't Transmit the HIV Virus](#) (Video Blog)
 - *by Maria T. Mejia*
- [HIV Undetectable = Untransmittable: Interview With Bruce Richman](#)
 - *by Nelson Vergel, from Program for Wellness Restoration*
- [Infant Feeding Basics: For Women Living with HIV in the US](#) (PDF)
 - *from HIVE*
- [If We Act to Remove Structural, Behavioral and Social Barriers, We Can End the HIV Epidemic With the Medicines We Already Have: A Conversation With Dr. Ben Young](#)
 - *by Olivia G. Ford, from TheBodyPRO.com*
- [Why, for HIV, Undetectable = Untransmittable](#)
 - *by Roger Pebody, from TheBody.com*