

# HIV: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



Western Australian  
AIDS COUNCIL

## **Introduction**

Who is this booklet for?.....	04
Some questions this booklet answers.....	05

## **What is HIV?**

The difference between HIV and AIDS.....	07
How do you get HIV?.....	08
The symptoms of HIV.....	10
How HIV affects your body.....	12

## **Testing for HIV**

How to find out if you have HIV?.....	14
Who should get tested?.....	15
How often should I get tested?.....	17
Type of HIV tests.....	18

## **Treating HIV**

How is HIV treated?.....	20
Where to get HIV treatment and how much it costs.....	21
Monitoring your health.....	22
Complimentary therapies.....	22

## **Preventing HIV**

Using condoms and lubricant.....	24
Taking treatment as prevention.....	25
Taking pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).....	25
Taking post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP).....	26
Using clean equipment to inject drugs.....	27

## **Using the health system**

Roles of health professionals and services in HIV.....	29
HIV services.....	30

## **Your Rights and HIV**

Stigma.....	33
HIV and your legal responsibilities.....	34
HIV and Immigration.....	35

<b>List of services</b> .....	37
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<b>Common Terms</b> .....	40
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# Who is this booklet for?

This resource is for anyone who wants to know more about HIV.

It covers what having HIV means, how you can protect yourself and ways to avoid passing it on to others.

It also covers HIV testing and HIV treatment in Australia.

## THIS BOOKLET IS FOR YOU IF YOU:

- Have had more than one sexual partner and haven't used a condom every time
- Are a man who has sex with other men
- Have a partner who has HIV
- Have a partner who has HIV, and you want to have a baby
- Have had sex in a country where HIV is common without a condom
- Have ever injected drugs using needles or other equipment that has been used by other people
- Have had tattoos, piercings, injections or medical procedures overseas and you are not sure that sterile equipment was used

# Did you know?

- There are many steps you can take to prevent your and your sexual partner/s getting HIV
- There are many ways you can get tested for HIV
- HIV treatment is easy to access in Western Australia, and it enables you to live a long and healthy life
- If you have HIV, there are many services that can help

## QUESTIONS YOU MAY HAVE ABOUT HIV:

- What is HIV, and is it the same as AIDS?
- How can I get HIV?
- What will happen to me if I get HIV?
- How can I keep safe and avoid getting HIV?
- Should I get tested for HIV?
- Where can I go for an HIV test?
- How can I get treated for HIV in Australia?
- What services are there that can help me?
- What are my rights if I have HIV?

# What is HIV?



## HIV STANDS FOR HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS

A person becomes HIV positive when the virus enters their body. It begins to multiply in the body and starts to attack your immune system.

Your immune system protects you against bacteria, germs and viruses. HIV weakens the immune system and makes it harder for you to fight infections and disease

## HIV and AIDS are different.

HIV/AIDS is often written together, but they mean different things.

HIV is the virus that damages your immune system. Without treatment, HIV can cause AIDS.

AIDS stands for Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome. It happens when your immune system becomes damaged by HIV, and you can't fight off infections. AIDS makes you very sick.

Many treatments are available. They fight HIV and lower the virus's ability to damage the immune system.

In Australia, almost everyone receives treatment for HIV and do not develop AIDS.

# How does someone get HIV?

There are only a few body fluids that can pass on HIV. These include blood, semen, vaginal fluids and breast milk.

HIV is passed on when the body fluids of a person with HIV enter the body of another person.

## YOU CAN GET HIV FROM:

- Having vaginal or anal sex without a condom
- Sharing needles and other injecting drug equipment
- Sharing body piercing or tattooing equipment
- Blood transfusions and medical procedures in some countries.

In Australia, blood transfusions and medical procedures are safe.

A mother can pass HIV to her child during pregnancy, childbirth or breastfeeding if she is HIV positive.

## YOU CANNOT GET HIV BY:


- Kissing, hugging or crying
- Coughing or sneezing
- Sharing a bed with someone with HIV
- Sharing food with someone with HIV
- Sharing a toilet or a shower with someone with HIV
- Mosquito or insect bites

# What are the symptoms of HIV?

Some people may experience symptoms when they first get HIV. When you first get HIV, you might feel sick; like you have the flu. You may feel tired and have:

- Fever
- Bad sweats in bed at night
- Skin rash
- Aches and pains

Many people will get no symptoms at all. Likewise, many people will get these symptoms from being sick but not having HIV. It is important to test for HIV regularly to know for sure.




# How does HIV affect the body?

Your immune system is what protects you from infection and disease. It is what keeps you healthy.

Your immune system is made up of different types of cells that work together to find and kill the germs, viruses and bacteria that make you ill.

One of the important cells are called CD4 cells (or T4 cells). These cells are the ones that HIV attacks and destroys.



## WITHOUT TREATMENT:

If someone is not taking HIV medication, HIV multiplies and destroys your CD4 cells. This damages your immune system.

Over time, if you are not on HIV treatment, the number of CD4 cells in your body will become very low. This is when you can develop AIDS.

If your immune system gets too weak and you develop AIDS, you are at higher risk of getting severe infections which could lead to death.

## WITH TREATMENT:

HIV attacks and destroys your CD4 cells, weakening your immune system. HIV treatment is highly effective at fighting HIV. It cannot cure your HIV, but it will reduce the amount of virus in your body.

With effective treatment, the virus stops damaging your immune system.

If you have had HIV for a long time, it may take longer for the treatment to stop the virus and allow your immune system to repair itself.

**The earlier you start treatment, the better for your health.**

# How can I find out if I have HIV?

## THE ONLY WAY TO KNOW IF YOU HAVE HIV IS TO HAVE AN HIV TEST.

In WA, there are many ways you can get an HIV test. You can:

- Go to a sexual health clinic
- Ask your doctor (GP) for a test
- Do an HIV self test at home

It is easy and always confidential. It is often free at many clinics. If you have a Medicare card, your HIV test will be covered.

At some clinics, you don't need a Medicare Card, and you don't need to give your real name if you don't want to. You will need to give at least two ways of contacting you, in case the clinic needs to reach you about your result. This can be a mobile phone number, email address or mailing address.

# Who should get tested?

**Anyone who thinks they may have HIV should get tested.**

## YOU SHOULD GET TESTED IF YOU:

- Have had more than one sexual partner and haven't used a condom every time
- Are a man who has sex with other men
- Have a partner who has HIV
- Have a partner who has HIV, and want to have a baby
- Have had sex without a condom in a country where HIV is common
- Have ever injected drugs using needles or other equipment that has been used by other people
- Have had tattoos, piercings, injections or medical procedures overseas and you are not sure that sterile equipment was used.



# Worried about getting tested?

It is normal to worry about getting an HIV test. The idea of getting a positive result can be scary, but testing is the only way you can know if you have HIV.

When people know that they have HIV, they can access HIV treatment and look after their health. They can also make sure they don't pass it on to others.

If you're worried about confidentiality, talk with your doctor or a sexual health clinic. All health information that your doctor has about you must be kept private and protected. This is the law in Australia.

# How often should I get tested?

How often you test for HIV depends on your situation.

If you have never tested for HIV, it is a good idea to test for HIV now.

Some people choose to test more often than others. Some may test every three or six months, a few times a year or only once a year. Some people get tested at the beginning of a new relationship. Others get tested when they think they have been exposed to HIV.

**Talk to your doctor or sexual health clinic to find out how often you should get tested and what is best of you.**

# Types of HIV tests:

There are several different ways to test for HIV. Some can be done earlier, and others can give you a faster result. Test done in a sexual health clinic or GP will give you better access to information and support if you need it.



## HIV BLOOD TEST (HIV antigen and antibody test)

This is the type of test most people will get.

You will have a blood sample taken. It will be sent to a laboratory for both the virus (antigen) and your body's reaction to HIV (antibody).

If your test shows HIV, your doctor or clinic will repeat the test to check the result is accurate.

This test is free at doctors clinics who bulk bill, and at sexual health clinics for most people. If your GP does not bulk bill, there may be costs you have to pay yourself.

## RAPID HIV TEST

The rapid HIV test screens for HIV antibodies. You will get a result in 20 minutes. The test involves a finger prick to draw blood that is dropped into the testing device.

The rapid HIV test is only available at M Clinic (see , a sexual health clinic for men who have sex with men, and costs \$30.

## HIV SELF TEST

A HIV self test kit lets you screen for HIV in your own home. It is ordered online (or purchased through M Clinic) and costs about \$30. A small needle will collect a few drops of blood from your finger, which are put into a part of the kit. You get the result in 15 minutes, though you will need to see a doctor to repeat the test if it shows HIV.

**Note:** The Rapid HIV Test and HIV Self Test reacts to the presence of HIV antibodies. This means they only give accurate results for HIV exposures that happened three months before the test.

If you have had an HIV exposure in the last 12 weeks, these tests will not be able to cover them.

**If you get a positive HIV test, start treatment early. You will stay healthy and keep your immune system strong. Treatment will reduce the amount of the virus in your body and will stop you from passing HIV to sexual partners.**

# Treating HIV

HIV treatment has changed a lot over the last 30 years. The medication available in Australia are highly effective.

HIV is treated with medications called antiretrovirals (ARVs). They do not get rid of HIV, but they can reduce the level of HIV in the body and stop it from harming your immune system.

Once the virus has been reduced to low enough levels, HIV cannot be passed on through sexual contact.

People with HIV on treatment can live a long, happy and healthy life. Treating treatment as soon as possible is better for your health.



## THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT HIV TREATMENTS:

- HIV treatment is very effective but is lifelong.
- You need to follow your doctor's orders about your treatment exactly and do not miss pills.
- You may get side effects. If you do, tell your doctor. They can put you on a different treatment to stop the side effects.
- Take the time to talk with your doctor about your treatment. Taking antiretrovirals is an important decision. You should make sure you have all the information you need.

## How can I get HIV treatment and how much does it cost?

A doctor who specialises in HIV is the best person to talk to about treatments. If your doctor does not have experience in HIV, make an appointment to see a doctor at a sexual health clinic.

You will be prescribed a medication that is right for you. You will need to take this prescription to:

**Hospital pharmacy:** Many people get their medication from the hospital pharmacy. That way, they can see their specialist and get their medication on the same visit.

**Local pharmacy:** You will need to check if they sell your HIV medication. It is important to think ahead, so you don't run out if they need to order it in. All pharmacists must keep your information private and confidential.

**Online pharmacy:** You can buy your HIV medication online and have them delivered. You will need to upload your prescription to do this.

In Western Australia, HIV treatment is provided free to everyone. If you don't have a Medicare card, you will still be able to receive HIV treatment for free.

Not all states provide HIV treatment free for people without Medicare cards. If you move to another state, you may need to pay for the medication yourself.

# Monitoring your health

It is also important to work with your doctor to stay healthy and protect yourself from other infections. Regular check-ups will help your doctor monitor your viral load and check for any changes in your health.

## COMPLIMENTARY THERAPIES

Some people with HIV choose to use complementary therapies along with taking HIV medication.

These include homeopathy, massage, acupuncture, hypnotherapy, vitamins and traditional medicine.

These therapies cannot cure or treat HIV but may help if you have side effects from your HIV medication.

# Common HIV terms

Here are some of the words your doctor will use to discuss your treatment with you:

## VIRAL LOAD

Viral load describes how much HIV is in your blood.

A high viral load means there is a lot of the virus in your body, and your immune system is being attacked.

A viral load that is low or undetectable means your immune system is not under attack. It is very unlikely that you will get sick or develop AIDS.

Tests measure your viral load to see how effective your treatment is. It may be working, or your doctor may need to change your medication.

## UNDETECTABLE VIRAL LOAD

An undetectable viral load means that there is such a low amount of HIV in the body that the test cannot find it. HIV is still in your body but in very small amounts.

When you have an undetectable viral load, you cannot pass HIV to other people through sexual contact. This means you can have a healthy sex life without passing HIV to your partners.

You can reach an undetectable viral load by taking treatments as your doctor tells you.



# Preventing HIV

There are many different ways you can prevent getting HIV or passing it to others, including:

- Using condoms and lubricant
- Taking HIV treatment and having an undetectable viral load
- Taking Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)
- Taking Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP)
- Using sterile needles and other equipment to inject drugs

## CONDOMS AND LUBRICANT

Condoms can help prevent you and others from getting infections that are passed on during sex, also known as sexually transmissible infections (STIs), including HIV.

Condoms come in all shapes, sizes and colours so you may need to try a few different types before you find ones that work for you. You should only use water-based or silicone lubricants with condoms. Oils and Vaseline will weaken the condom, and it may tear.

Condoms are easy to buy. You can find them in supermarkets, pharmacies and convenience stores. You can purchase condoms online and even find them in vending machines in public bathrooms.

You can also get free condoms and lubricant from organisations around Western Australia, including sexual health clinics, community health centres and family planning clinics. The WA AIDS Council provides free condoms at all of its services.

# Treatment as prevention

If you are living with HIV, taking HIV treatments as ordered by your doctor will make your viral load undetectable. You will need to see your doctor occasionally to monitor your viral load and make sure that your HIV treatment is still effective.

Have an undetectable viral load means you cannot pass HIV to other people through sexual contact. This is still some risk of passing HIV on through other ways, like childbirth, breastfeeding or sharing needles.

## PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS (PrEP)

If you do not have HIV, PrEP is a way of protecting yourself from getting HIV by taking a tablet once a day, every day.

If you are a man starting on PrEP, you will need to take it every day for seven days before you are fully protected from HIV, and then continue to take one PrEP pill every day.

Women need to take PrEP for a longer period before they are fully protected from HIV. If you are a woman, you will need to take PrEP every day for 20 days before you are fully protected, and then continue to take one PrEP pill every day.

You should take the tablet at the same time every day. If you don't take the tablet every day, you may not be protected against HIV.

PrEP does not stop you from getting other sexually transmitted infections. It is still important to use condoms to help you avoid getting other STIs.

Talk to your doctor or sexual health clinic to find out if PrEP is right for you.

## **POST-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS (PEP)**

PEP is taking HIV treatments after you think you have come into contact with HIV, for four weeks, to help protect you from getting HIV.

PEP is for anyone who thinks they may have come into contact with HIV because they have:

- Had sex without a condom
- Shared needles or other equipment to inject drugs

You should start taking PEP as soon as possible. It will only work if you take it within 72 hours after contact with HIV.

If your doctor thinks PEP is right for you, you will need to take it every day for 28 days.

You can get PEP from sexual health clinics, doctors who specialise in HIV and hospitals.

# Using Sterile Equipment to Inject Drugs

Only using your own or new needles, syringes and other equipment is the best way to protect yourself and others from HIV.

Free needles and equipment are available from Needle and Syringe Programs (NSPs) and some chemists.

The WA AIDS Council has two first sites in Fremantle and West Perth. We also have a van that visits sites around Perth, including Armadale, Belmont, Gosnells, Joondalup, Mirrabooka, Midland and Rockingham.

**For more information, visit our Facebook page:**  
[www.facebook.com/waacvan](https://www.facebook.com/waacvan)



# Using the health system

The health system is made up of services, organisations and people who provide health care. These include hospitals, clinics, doctors, nurses, social workers and interpreters.

Finding the information and services you need can be difficult, especially if you are not well or if your English is limited.

You may need to use some health services you have not used before. It is important you know which health care services are available and how they can help you.

Many health services are free if you have a Medicare Card. This is called bulk billing. However, you may still have to pay for medication or some tests that are ordered for you.

If you have a Medicare Card, ask if bulk billing is available before you see the doctor or any other health care worker.

Always take your Medicare Card with you when visiting your doctor, a clinic or a hospital.

If you do not have a Medicare Card, you can use some sexual health clinics at no cost.

**To find a sexual health clinic near you, go to [www.waaid.com/testing](http://www.waaid.com/testing)**

## Roles of Health Care Professionals and Services in HIV

### GENERAL PRACTITIONERS (GP)

GPs are doctors that work in the community instead of hospitals. You can visit a GP at a medical centre or private practice.

Some GPs bulk bill if you have a Medicare card (you do not pay), but some GPs charge an extra fee for their service. It is always important to check if there will be a fee to see the GP.

If you have HIV, it's important to find a GP who understands HIV and has experience treating people who are living with HIV. Not all GPs can prescribe HIV treatment. If your GP can't prescribe HIV treatment, they can refer you to a GP or specialist doctor who can.

Any GP can prescribe PrEP, so if you think PrEP is right for you, speak to your GP.

### SPECIALISTS

Specialists are doctors who are trained in a particular health issue. Specialists in HIV medicine will supervise every stage of your treatment and care. You must have a referral letter from your GP to book an appointment with an HIV specialist.

## HOSPITALS

Hospitals provide specialised treatment for unwell people, including people with HIV. Some HIV specialists are located in hospitals.

## SEXUAL HEALTH CLINICS

Sexual health clinics are located across WA. These clinics provide medical services, counselling and support in sexual and reproductive health, including HIV.

All sexual health clinics:

- Have staff who are very experienced in HIV
- Are free or low cost

Some sexual health clinics:

- Are open some evenings
- Do not ask for identification
- Will see people who do not have a Medicare Card

## COUNSELLORS, SOCIAL WORKERS AND PSYCHOLOGISTS

Many services have counsellors, social workers and psychologists you can talk to you about your feelings and find solutions to some of the challenges of living with HIV.

A counsellor or social worker can:

- Help you find services
- Explain things about HIV treatment you might not understand
- Provide emotional support
- Help you decide who to tell that you have HIV, how to
- Tell them, and even be with you when you do tell them

## INTERPRETERS

If you don't feel comfortable speaking in English, you can have an interpreter present when you are talking with health care workers or other services.

The interpreter's job is to translate everything you and the health care worker say to each other.

By using an interpreter, you can:

- Understand everything you are being told
- Be sure everything you say is understood
- Ask questions and get answers
- Understand and consent to tests and treatment

Like all health care professionals, interpreters must protect your confidentiality.

**Telephone interpreters are also available anywhere in Australia. This service is called Telephone Interpreter Service (TIS). The service is free and does not need to be booked in advance. To use TIS, call 131450.**



# Your rights and HIV

## SOME COMMON FEELINGS PEOPLE HAVE ABOUT HIV:

“I’m alive but I don’t feel like I’m living in the world because I have locked myself away from my community.”

“I’m afraid to test. What if it is positive? My family will disown me. I would rather not know.”

“In my country there is lots of prejudice against people with HIV.”

“My family were embarrassed and didn’t want to talk to me.”

“I don’t want to get my visa cancelled and have to go back home. I am free to be who I am in Australia.”

“In my culture, we don’t talk about sex even with my gay friends.”

## HIV Stigma

Stigma is when someone experiences negative beliefs, feelings and views because of their gender, sexuality, race, colour, health problems or religious beliefs.

When a person is seen as different, they can be judged and discriminated against, and experience stigma. This can cause people living with HIV to become isolated and may stop people from getting tested for HIV, starting treatment and using health and support services.

In Australia, it is against the law for any person or health care worker to discriminate against you. They cannot judge you, criticise you or refuse you service because of your gender, sexuality, race, colour, health problems or religious beliefs.

# HIV and your legal responsibilities

It is important to know about HIV and the law.

In WA, by law, you don't need to tell someone that you have HIV before having sex as long as you take reasonable precautions to protect them from getting HIV.

Reasonable precautions to avoid passing on HIV may include:

- Using a condom
- Having an undetectable viral load (from being on HIV treatment)
- Your sexual partner is taking pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).

If you are living with HIV, you should ask your doctor what reasonable precautions you can take to protect your partners from HIV.

# HIV and Immigration

Some people are worried about being tested or treated for HIV because they are afraid it will impact their visa to live in Australia.

It is important to note that your health information is only released to your health care providers and necessary health officials.

Information about your diagnosis must be released to the Western Australian Department of Health, however, this information is kept confidential and only used to support treatment and prevention of HIV.

While Australia commonly does not grant permanent residency to people with HIV, that does not mean you will be removed from Australia as soon as you are diagnosed as HIV positive.

# Services

## WA AIDS COUNCIL (WAAC)

WAAC specialises in HIV prevention, HIV support and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) health. WAAC helps people with HIV take control of their health, as well as the health of their partners, by providing information, programs and services including counselling, support and support groups.

**For more information, go to [www.waaid.com](http://www.waaid.com)  
Phone: 08 9482 0000**

## M CLINIC

M Clinic is a sexual health clinic for men who have sex with men, including people who are trans and gender diverse. It provides a wide range of services including the testing and treatment of sexually transmissible infections (STIs), education and support and access to PrEP. Appointments are low cost or free, depending on the situation.

**For more information, go to [www.mclinic.org.au](http://www.mclinic.org.au)  
Phone: 08 9227 0734**

## **POSITIVE ORGANISATION OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA (POWA)**

POWA is a peer-led non-profit organisation run by people with HIV for people with HIV. Their mission is to provide advocacy, services, leadership and representation across the diverse needs of all people with HIV in Western Australia.

**For more information, go to [www.postivewa.org](http://www.postivewa.org)  
Phone: 0431 905 338**

## **HIV/AIDS LEGAL CENTRE (HALC)**

HALC provides free legal assistance to people in WA living with HIV or hepatitis.

**For more information, go to [www.halc.org.au](http://www.halc.org.au)  
Phone: 02 9206 2060  
Email: [halc@halc.org.au](mailto:halc@halc.org.au)**

## **PEER BASED HARM REDUCTION**

Peer Based Harm Reduction WA provides non-judgmental, friendly peer-based support, information and education, advocacy and harm reduction services and services for people who use drugs in WA.

**For more information, go to [www.harmreductionwa.org](http://www.harmreductionwa.org)  
Phone: 08 9325 8387**

## **SEXUAL HEALTH QUARTERS (SHQ)**

SHQ is an organisation that provide support services around a wide range of sexual health topics, including testing and treatment of STIs, family planning and counselling. SHQ appointments are either low cost or free, depending on the situation.

**For more information, go to [www.shq.org.au](http://www.shq.org.au)  
Phone: 08 9227 6177**

## **SOUTH TERRACE CLINIC**

South Terrace Clinic is a sexual health clinic based out of Fremantle Hospital. They provide testing, treatment and management services for all sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV. It is a free service and a Medicare card is not required.

**For more information, phone 08 9431 3145**



## **WHERE TO GET TESTED**

**Find a full list of HIV testing locations in Western Australia at [www.waaid.com/testing](http://www.waaid.com/testing)**

# HIV Terms You May Hear



## **Adherence**

When you take HIV treatment every day as your doctor has ordered

## **Antibody**

Antibodies are made by the body to fight bacteria and viruses like HIV

## **ARV**

Antiretroviral medications are medicines used to treat HIV

## **Bulk Billing**

If a doctor bulk bills, your visit is free as Medicare pays the doctor. If your doctor does not bulk bill, you pay the doctor and claim some money back from Medicare

## **CD4 Cells**

CD4 cells are a type of immune system cell that HIV attacks and kills over time. The less CD4 cells in the

## **Condoms**

A thin latex bag that fits on an erect penis to stop pregnancy and reduce the chance of passing on HIV and STIs

## **Confidentiality**

Any information that a health care professional has about you is private. A health care provider can only repeat what you say with your permission or in very special circumstances.

## **Diagnosis**

The conclusion a doctor may reach after examining, doing tests and talking with their patients

## **HIV Negative**

Someone who does not have HIV

## **HIV Positive**

Someone who has HIV

## **HIV Status**

HIV status is about whether you are HIV positive or HIV negative

## **HIV Test**

Blood test used to find HIV antibodies. Also called HIV Antibody Test

## **Infection**

A germ in or on the body that makes you sick. Infections can be caused by viruses, bacteria, fungi or parasites

## **PEP**

Post-exposure prophylaxis is treatment taken by an HIV negative person within 72 hours after a potential HIV risk to prevent HIV infection

## **PrEP**

Pre-exposure prophylaxis or PrEP is when an HIV negative person takes HIV medications every day to protect them from HIV

## Rapid HIV Test

A small drop of blood from your finger is used to test for HIV. A result is ready in 20 minutes

## Section 100 (s100)

### Highly Specialised Drugs

Highly Specialised Drugs are medicines used to treat and prevent HIV, which can only be prescribed by doctors who are specially trained

## Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)

Infections spread through sexual contact. They are caused by bacteria, viruses or parasites

## Seroconversion

The time it takes for HIV antibodies to be detectable in the blood after infection. This is sometimes called the 'window period'

## Side effect

A negative reaction to medication or treatment

## Stigma

Negative beliefs, feelings and views that people have towards someone because of their gender, sexuality, race, colour, health problems or religious beliefs

## Treatment as Prevention (TasP)

Involves taking HIV medication as ordered by your doctor to make your viral load undetectable

Transmission

The passing of a disease from one person to another

## Treatment

Something that a person does so that they can stay healthy or get better. Treatments can involve taking medicine, complementary therapies and/ or changes in lifestyle

## Undetectable viral load (UVL)

An undetectable viral load means that HIV is in very small amounts in your body. This is the main goal of HIV treatment because the immune system isn't being attacked and a person cannot pass HIV to sexual partners

## Viral load

Describes the amount of HIV in your blood. The higher the viral load, the higher the chance of passing on HIV, and the quicker HIV can weaken your immune system.

## Virus

A germ that some antibiotics cannot treat. HIV and hepatitis B and C are viruses that cannot be treated by antibiotics. They can all be treated by antiviral medications.

## Window period

See 'seroconversion'.



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