

What is Undetectable?

Viral load tests measure the amount of RNA (*the virus' genetic material*) in a sample of blood as the number of RNA copies per millilitre (*copies/ml*).

HIV treatment works by stopping the virus reproducing and suppresses the viral load to an undetectable level.

Suppressing the virus maintains your immune system and keeps you healthy. In terms of preventing HIV transmission undetectable is defined as anything less than 200 copies/ml. When the viral load is <200 copies/ml there is **a zero risk of HIV transmission** to sexual partners.

The time it takes to achieve an undetectable viral load varies between individuals but is usually within three to six months of starting treatment. Once the viral load is undetectable it is important that people are adherent – meaning they continue to take their treatment as prescribed – and have their viral load monitored regularly to ensure they remain healthy and undetectable.

TREATMENT MAKES HIV UNDETECTABLE AND UNTRANSMITTABLE (U=U)

People living with HIV who are on treatment and have an undetectable viral load (<200 copies/mL) cannot sexually transmit HIV

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I'M LIVING WITH HIV



MY HUSBAND IS NOT, AS I CAN'T PASS IT ON

MY MUM IS LIVING WITH HIV

I'M NOT, BECAUSE SHE CAN'T PASS IT ON



Does having an STI affect things?

Having an STI is not significant to HIV transmission when the partner with HIV has an undetectable viral load. An STI in the presence of a detectable viral load may increase the risk of HIV transmission.

U=U only applies to Sexual Transmission

It does not apply to injecting drug use or other ways that HIV may be transmitted.

U=U & Pregnancy

Yes, you can have sex and conceive children with no risk of transmission between partners or to the baby.

The risk of a mother who has an undetectable viral load passing HIV on to their unborn baby is practically zero (0.1%) while engaged in antenatal care. U=U does not apply to breastfeeding.

PrEP & PEP

Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) and Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) are not needed if an HIV negative individual has sex with someone who is HIV positive, is on treatment and has an undetectable viral load.

HIV negative individuals only need PEP or PrEP if they have condomless sex with somebody who does not know their HIV status or who is HIV positive but has a detectable viral load.

HIV Diagnosis & Care

It's important to test regularly to identify as soon as possible whether you have acquired HIV. HIV treatment is fully funded in New Zealand for everyone and you should start treatment as soon as you are ready.

Disclosure

People living with HIV are entitled to an active, healthy sex life. **You do not have to tell a sexual partner that you have HIV, as long as you take appropriate precautions to prevent sexually transmitting HIV.** In New Zealand, what is considered 'appropriate precautions' is using a condom for vaginal or anal sex. While adhering to treatment so you maintain an undetectable viral load offers more protection than condom use, undetectable has yet to be recognised under NZ law.

When somebody does not achieve an undetectable viral load

It's important not to stigmatise or marginalise people who, for whatever reason, do not achieve an undetectable viral load. We must ensure we do everything we can to support them to do so while respecting their choices. This includes addressing social, psychological and stigma-related barriers to engagement in care and adherence to treatment.