

U=U is changing the world of HIV

**U=U**

**IS CHANGING  
THE WORLD OF HIV.**

**Let's set the record straight:  
HIV is no longer  
transmittable.**

With proper treatment,  
HIV is **UNDETECTABLE**.  
That means it's **UNTRANSMITTABLE**.

**U = U — UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE**

 [zerotransmission.org](http://zerotransmission.org)

  

U=U is changing the world of HIV.

You could also say that U=U is simply changing the world.

This revolutionary equation, based on a ton of scientific data (see below), says that when HIV is treated effectively, there is no transmission of HIV.

U=U means "**undetectable = untransmittable**".

**Undetectable** means that the viral load, or the amount of HIV virus in the blood, is very low.

**Untransmittable** means that when the viral load is undetectable, HIV is not transmitted.

U=U is changing the world! After decades of fear and stigma, it's time to spread the word and celebrate this great advance!

Treatment **allows people living with HIV to live long and healthy lives.**  
It also **prevents transmission of the virus.**

If this scientific fact is still under-reported in the field of HIV, it is not even known by the general public. Unfortunately, people living with HIV are still discriminated against on many levels because of the fear of HIV that was instilled during the dark years of the AIDS epidemic. Among other things, the results of a [2019 survey on dental care and HIV](#) (in French only) showed:

*"[...] a lack of information, from either health care staff, support staff or both, about:*

- HIV and his impact on dental care;*
- The effectiveness of universal precautions;*
- The purpose of the health questionnaire.*

*These gaps fuel differential treatment and, in turn, reluctance to seek care by people living with HIV."*

## Non-transmission and transmission contexts

An update on the current realities of HIV is essential, while it is still necessary to recall the contexts of non-transmission and transmission.

### **HIV is NOT transmitted in everyday situations, such as:**

- Using the toilet
- Sharing glasses and utensils
- Physical contact, such as shaking hands, hugging or kissing
- Sneezing and spitting
- Mosquito bites or other insect bites
- Eating, working or playing sports with an HIV-positive person

### **HIV is transmitted through five bodily fluids:**

- Sperm and pre-ejaculatory fluid (pre-cum)
- Anal secretions
- Frontal secretions
- Blood
- Breast / chest milk

HIV is transmitted only when one of these fluids, from an HIV-positive person who doesn't know their status or is not undergoing efficient treatment, comes into contact with the blood system of an HIV-negative person.

This can happen, for example, through:

- A cut on the skin (bleeding, wound)
- Ejaculation
- Frontal or anal secretions
- Breastfeeding or chestfeeding
- Sharing equipment for drug injection or inhalation
- Mucous membranes: vaginal, anal, around the penis

- Using unsterilized or poorly sterilized tattoo or piercing equipment

## The scientific data on U=U

For more than 20 years, scientific studies have reported cases of non-transmission of HIV in serodifferent couples (where one partner is living with HIV) when the viral load is low.

In 2008, following an analysis of the results of various HIV research studies, the Federal Commission for AIDS-related problems in Switzerland sent shockwaves when it published a bulletin for Swiss doctors with the conclusion: "HIV-positive people with no other STIs and on effective antiretroviral treatment do not transmit HIV sexually" (free translation). According to this group of researchers, HIV-positive people had to have an undetectable viral load for 6 months, have very good adherence to treatment and not have any STI.

It would take another ten years of published results from major scientific studies before the rest of the HIV community would loudly affirm U=U.

<b>Studies<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Research Topics</b>	<b>Results</b>
<a href="#">PARTNER</a> 2016 (phase 1) 2018 (phase 2)	<b>Phase 1:</b> Heterosexual couples and HIV-positive gay men's couples (with one partner living with HIV)  <b>Phase 2:</b> HIV-positive gay male couples (with one partner living with HIV)	Approximately 36,000 condomless sexual encounters in heterosexual couples  Approximately 70,000 sex acts without condoms in gay male couples  0 transmissions within couples when viral load was undetectable
<a href="#">Opposites Attract</a> 2017	HIV-positive gay male couples (with one partner living with HIV)	Approximately 12,000 condomless sex  0 transmission within couples when viral load was undetectable
<a href="#">HPTN 052</a> 2011	Heterosexual HIV-different couples divided into two groups:  <b>1)</b> HIV treatment initiated at baseline  <b>2)</b> HIV treatment started later (later)	0 transmission within couples when viral load was undetectable  In group <b>1)</b> 1 case of infection within a couple before the viral load became undetectable  In group <b>2)</b> 27 cases of infections in couples before the start of treatment

1. This table is a summary from the [Ontario AIDS Networks' U=U consensus statement](#). It has been adapted for use in this paper.

## U=U changes the world, literally!

The message of "undetectable = untransmittable" was brought to light by a person living with HIV. Bruce Richman had been living with HIV for 10 years when he learned that there was no risk of transmission. Shocked to learn this happy news so late in life, he mobilized community stakeholders and researchers from major studies to develop a consensus statement to share this vital information. The [Prevention Access Campaign](#) was born. By 2022, more than 1,000 organizations from over 100 countries had signed the position statement.

Today, U=U is the consensus of various international institutions involved in the response to HIV/AIDS, such as:

- [World Health Organization](#)
- [UNAIDS](#)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (US Public Health)

## U=U is also changing the world in Quebec and Canada

The Quebec Ministry of Health and Social Services published a [ministerial position](#) (in French only) in October 2018 on "The effect of treatment of people living with HIV on the risk of sexual transmission of the infection" stating:

*"There is no evidence of transmission of HIV infection during oral, vaginal or anal sex without a condom*

- *when the person living with HIV is taking antiretroviral therapy as prescribed **and***
- *their viral load, as measured by consecutive laboratory tests every four to six months, is maintained at less than 200 copies per milliliter of blood.*

*In this setting, the risk of transmission is negligible."*

(For public health, "negligible" means there is a theoretical potential for transmission, but zero reported cases).

The MSSS position echoes the [Public Health Agency of Canada's statement](#), released in 2017, which reached the same conclusions:

*"It has become clear that when a person living with HIV is on antiretroviral therapy, taking their medications as prescribed and has a confirmed suppressed viral load, the risk of transmitting HIV to sexual partners is virtually zero."*

## The origins of « U=U is changing the world of HIV »

COCQ-SIDA's member organizations commissioned the creation of a message to convey this important information. As part of the 24th International AIDS Conference in Montreal in 2022, the Coalition joined forces with the Prevention Access Campaign and Coalition PLUS to share a strong collective message.

We are grateful to [Tandem Mauricie](#), [BLITSS](#), [le Dispensaire](#), [MIELS-Québec](#), [GAP-VIES](#), [CASM](#), [RÉZO](#) and [Portail VIH/sida du Québec](#) for their involvement. We also thank Bruce Richman of [Prevention Access Campaign](#) as well as [Upperkut](#) who realized the campaign.

If you have any questions

Contact the [nearest HIV organization](#) .

or

Text [SextEd](#) or [Sext'Info](#) (confidential service in French)