

Antiretroviral treatment (ART)

ART is the treatment for HIV – a combination of three or more antiretroviral drugs that target different stages of the HIV lifecycle.

CD4 count

Your CD4 count is an indication of how healthy your immune system is - it should go up when you have HIV treatment. It's the number of CD4 cells (or T-helper cells) in your blood which is measured by a simple blood test. It's often talked about at the same time as viral load (the concentration of HIV in your blood): generally when your CD4 count is high, your viral load is low and vice versa.

Chemsex

Chemsex describes the sex that gay men have when using certain drugs. It can involve groups (including larger party settings), couples or lone masturbation.

Co-infection

Co-infection is when someone has more than one serious infection at the same time. For example, when a person with HIV also has tuberculosis (TB), they are said to have an HIV/TB co-infection. This can make treatment for both infections more difficult, but also more important.

Comorbidity

Comorbidity describes someone who has two or more diseases or health conditions at a time. For example, a person with HIV may also have high blood pressure.

Drug resistance

If someone with HIV doesn't take their antiretroviral treatment properly, the drugs may become unable to control the virus which can cause the treatment to stop working – this is called drug resistance. It's also possible for someone who has developed a drug-resistant strain of HIV to pass it on.

Ending the Epidemic (EtE)

Refers to the United States' commitment to reduce the number of new HIV infections in the United States by 75% by 2025 and by 90% by 2030.

False negative result

A false negative result is when a person has HIV but an HIV test shows that they don't have it. A false negative result usually happens during the window period immediately after initial infection, before current tests are able to detect it.

False positive result

A false positive result is when a person does not have HIV but an HIV test shows that they do. Whenever someone receives a positive test result, they are tested again to confirm the result.

HIV

HIV stands for Human Immunodeficiency Virus. It attacks a person's immune system cells, and if left untreated severely damages their immune system and their ability to fight off infections.

Mixed-status couple / Serodiscordance

A mixed-status couple, or serodiscordance, is when one person has HIV and the other does not. It is also known as a serodiscordant couple, a discordant couple, or a serodifferent couple.

Post-exposure Prophylaxis (PEP)

PEP is short-term treatment that must be taken within 72 hours of possible exposure to HIV, for example, after unprotected sex. It stops HIV spreading throughout the body.

Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)

PrEP is a daily course of antiretroviral drugs that can prevent HIV infection. It's for men and women who do not have HIV but who may be at higher risk of HIV infection because they have an HIV-positive partner, or are unable to negotiate condom use, or are having repeated sex without a condom. When PrEP is adhered to exactly as prescribed, it eliminates the risk of HIV infection. But if doses are missed then the risk of infection increases substantially.

Self-testing / Home-testing

HIV self-testing, or home-testing, offers the convenience of taking a test in the comfort of your own home or other private place. These kits are becoming more widely available and give a result in 15 to 20 minutes.

Sexually transmitted infection (STI)

STIs are infections that are passed on during sexual contact. Examples include chlamydia, genital herpes, gonorrhoea, hepatitis C and trichomoniasis. HIV is also a sexually transmitted infection although there are other ways it can be passed on.

T-helper cells

See CD4 count above.

Undetectable / virally suppressed

A person living with HIV is considered to have an ‘undetectable’ viral load – or to be virally suppressed – when antiretroviral treatment has brought the level of virus in their body to such low levels that blood tests cannot detect it. As long as treatment is adhered to and a person’s viral load remains undetectable (as monitored by a health professional), they can’t pass HIV on to others through sex, and their health is not affected by the virus.

Undetectable Equals Untransmittable (U = U)

Undetectable Equals Untransmittable (U = U) means that individuals with HIV who receive antiretroviral therapy (ART), and have achieved and maintained an undetectable viral load for at least six months, cannot sexually transmit HIV to others.

Viral load

A person’s viral load is the amount of HIV virus in their blood. It is measured by a simple blood test. It indicates how well a person’s antiretroviral treatment is working.

Window period

The time between HIV infection and when the body produces enough HIV antibodies to be detected by an HIV test is called the window period. This is between 2 and 12 weeks depending on the type of test.