

U = U

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**FLAGSHIP  
ENDORSEMENTS**

UPDATED 29 MARCH 2022



prevention  
access  
campaign

# INTRODUCTION

In this brief, you'll find PAC's collection of endorsements of U=U from some of the most influential and important sources in the global HIV response. We hope the preeminent institutions' clear language to describe U=U will provide you with additional credibility and support as you share the revolutionary news in personal, community, clinical, and policy spaces.



National Institutes  
of Health



National Institute of  
Allergy and  
Infectious Diseases

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**JAMA** The Journal of the  
American Medical Association





## **WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION (WHO)**

### **Consolidated Guidelines on HIV Prevention, Testing, Treatment, Service Delivery and Monitoring: Recommendations for a Public Health Approach**

ARV drugs play a key role in HIV prevention. People taking ART who achieved viral suppression (<200 copies/ml) do not transmit HIV to sexual partners.<sup>1</sup>

Post-test counselling messages remain key. They should be concise, addressing the needs of the client and focused on supporting linkage to care. Messages need to provide clients with the latest information, including: <sup>2,3</sup>

- the personal health benefits of early ART,
- that people with HIV on ART who achieve and maintain viral suppression cannot transmit HIV to their partners

### **Joint Statement Ministry of Public Health OF Thailand, World Health Organization (WHO) and Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)**

#### ***People Living with HIV with an Undetectable Viral Load Cannot Transmit HIV Sexually***

The Ministry of Public Health of Thailand, UNAIDS and WHO endorse Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U).<sup>4</sup>

With U=U, HIV treatment has transformed the HIV prevention landscape. Not only does HIV treatment have life-changing individual benefits by enabling people living with HIV to stay healthy, maintain their quality of life and have a lifespan similar to people not living with HIV, it is now recognized to have important population health benefits by interrupting transmission of HIV. U=U can also have enormous benefits in reducing stigma and motivating people living with HIV to test, start and maintain treatment, become virally suppressed and continue follow-up care.<sup>4</sup>

It is important to raise awareness and promote the knowledge about U=U within the healthcare sector, communities, people living with HIV and other partners in the HIV response.<sup>4</sup>



## Viral Suppression for HIV Treatment Success and Prevention of Sexual Transmission of HIV

The science related to the use of ART as an additional prevention tool is clear: there is no evidence that individuals who have successfully achieved and maintained viral suppression through ART transmit the virus sexually to their HIV-negative partner(s). The preventive benefits of ART should be appropriately emphasized in HIV treatment and prevention programmes.<sup>5</sup>

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**1** WHO (2021). Consolidated guidelines on HIV prevention, testing, treatment, service delivery and monitoring: Recommendations for a public health approach. (Pg. 66). Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240031593>

**2** Ibid. (Pg. 343). Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240031593>

**3** WHO (2019). Consolidated guidelines on HIV testing services for a changing epidemic. (Pg. 6) Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/WHO-CDS-HIV-19.31>

**4** UNAIDS (2020). Joint Statement Ministry of Public Health of Thailand, World Health Organization (Who) and Joint United Nations Programme on Hiv/Aids (UNAIDS). Retrieved from <https://unaids-ap.org/joint-statement-ministry-of-public-health-of-thailand-world-health-organization-who-and-joint-united-nations-programme-on-hiv-aids-unaids/>

**5** WHO (2018). Viral suppression for HIV treatment success and prevention of sexual transmission of HIV. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/news/item/20-07-2018-viral-suppression-for-hiv-treatment-success-and-prevention-of-sexual-transmission-of-hiv>



# THE UNITED STATES PRESIDENT'S EMERGENCY PLAN FOR AIDS RELIEF (PEPFAR)

*U=U education is a requirement of all PEPFAR countries.<sup>6</sup>*

## **PEPFAR 2022 Country and Regional Operational Plan (COP/ROP) Guidance for all PEPFAR Countries**

### ***Scale-up of Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U) messaging for Key Populations***

The idea that someone living with HIV, who is both on treatment and virally undetectable, cannot transmit the virus to a sexual partner is revolutionary.

U=U messaging has the potential to reduce stigma toward PLHIV, including self- stigma; increase demand for HIV testing and ART, including early initiation of treatment; improve treatment adherence; and increase understanding that a suppressed VL is important to maintain the long-term health of PLHIV.

The concept of U=U can also strengthen advocacy efforts for universal access to effective treatment and care, and messaging around U=U should be well-integrated into HIV prevention, care, and treatment programs, including those serving key populations.

Prevention Access Campaign is the leading site for U=U information, resources, and news.<sup>7</sup>

## **Prevention Programming**

Treatment as prevention should remain an important aspect of holistic prevention programming, as people living with HIV who achieve and maintain an undetectable viral load on treatment cannot sexually transmit HIV (U=U).<sup>8</sup>



## **Continuity of Treatment and Ensuring Programs Work for People Living with HIV**

The following interventions form the core package of PEPFAR's approach to durable and effective treatment.

The foundation to empowering people in their treatment journey is treatment literacy. Providers should describe new treatment paradigms using hopeful language that includes the benefits of viral suppression (including the science of U=U) achieved by consistently taking ARVs.<sup>9</sup>

## **Linkage to ART, Early Engagement, and Treatment Literacy**

### ***Treatment Literacy***

Research from Malawi, South Africa, and Zimbabwe suggests that what people living with HIV are learning about ART is not motivating many of them to stay on treatment.

This motivation gap is partly due to a knowledge and confidence gap among providers, who often leave out information about the benefits of treatment, including its role in preventing transmission (U=U) when talking to patients. The significance of viral suppression with respect to health, sexual "normalcy" and preventing viral transmission should be emphasized.<sup>10</sup>

## **Approach to Viral Load Testing**

Creating demand for VL remains a challenge in many national HIV programs. The following education points should be widely disseminated by all providers, community health workers and counselors doing HIV testing.

1. A suppressed viral load is critical to ensuring healthy living with HIV.
2. U=U. It is now widely accepted that individuals who are virally suppressed cannot pass HIV to their sexual partners.<sup>11</sup>

Treatment literacy efforts should include education of healthcare workers on the benefits of treatment to prevent onward transmission (U=U).<sup>12</sup>



## Build coping potential with messages on the benefits of therapy

Treatment literacy which focuses on the benefits of viral suppression (see Section 6.1.1) U=U messaging. The message that viral suppression means that HIV cannot be transmitted to sexual partners is a powerful motivator for many individuals, and counselling and messaging should emphasize this information.

Reframing the treatment narrative with aspirational and achievable goals, allowing individual clients agency in these goals may go a long way to achieving therapeutic success and viral suppression.<sup>13</sup>

**6**

PEPFAR (2021). PEPFAR 2022 Country and Regional Operational Plan (COP/ROP) Guidance for all PEPFAR Countries. (Pg. 136; Figure 3.2.1.1 ) Retrieved from [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/COP22-Guidance-Final\\_508-Compliant.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/COP22-Guidance-Final_508-Compliant.pdf)

**7**

Ibid. (Pg. 452) Retrieved from [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/COP22-Guidance-Final\\_508-Compliant.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/COP22-Guidance-Final_508-Compliant.pdf)

**8**

Ibid. (Pg. 661) Retrieved from [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/COP22-Guidance-Final\\_508-Compliant.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/COP22-Guidance-Final_508-Compliant.pdf)

**9**

Ibid. (Pg. 187) Retrieved from [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/COP22-Guidance-Final\\_508-Compliant.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/COP22-Guidance-Final_508-Compliant.pdf)

**10**

Ibid. (Pg. 196) Retrieved from [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/COP22-Guidance-Final\\_508-Compliant.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/COP22-Guidance-Final_508-Compliant.pdf)  
PEPFAR Tweet (2021). Retrieved from <https://twitter.com/PEPFAR/status/1455980616218992650>

**11**

Ibid. (Pg. 403) Retrieved from [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/COP22-Guidance-Final\\_508-Compliant.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/COP22-Guidance-Final_508-Compliant.pdf)

**12**

Ibid. (Pg. 404) Retrieved from [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/COP22-Guidance-Final\\_508-Compliant.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/COP22-Guidance-Final_508-Compliant.pdf)

**13**

Ibid. (Pg. 210) Retrieved from [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/COP22-Guidance-Final\\_508-Compliant.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/COP22-Guidance-Final_508-Compliant.pdf)



## **CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (CDC)**

### **Starting the Conversation: HIV Treatment as Prevention**

#### **Undetectable Equals Untransmittable (U=U)**

Your patients may refer to treatment as prevention as U=U. The U=U campaign was developed by members of the HIV community to increase awareness about the relationship between viral suppression and the prevention of sexual transmission of HIV. For more information, visit [preventionaccess.org](http://preventionaccess.org).<sup>14</sup>

### **Let's Stop HIV Together**

Achieving and maintaining an undetectable viral load prevents HIV transmission to your HIV-negative partner through sex.<sup>15</sup>

Taking your medication as prescribed and keeping an undetectable viral load are the best things you can do to stay healthy, and doing so also prevents you from sexually transmitting HIV to your HIV-negative partner.<sup>16</sup>

Being undetectable is when your HIV viral load is so low that it can't be detected. So it can't be transmitted through sex.<sup>17</sup>

### **CDC Global U=U Toolkit**

Once your viral load is undetectable, you cannot give HIV to people you have sex with.<sup>18</sup>

If you continue taking your medicine every day, the amount of HIV will remain low and you won't pass HIV to people you have sex with.<sup>16</sup>

### **Dear Colleague Letter from Dr. Eugene McCray 2019 (Director, Division of HIV/AIDS Prevention at the CDC 2014–2020)**

I am writing to encourage you to continue your work to spread the word about the power of viral suppression to improve the health of people with HIV and to prevent the sexual transmission of HIV. This information is important and has the power to change lives.<sup>19</sup>



For ART, the science is strong and clear; the data show that the effectiveness for ART with viral suppression is estimated to be 100% for preventing sexual transmission of HIV.<sup>17</sup>

We urge you to share this groundbreaking science with your communities. Research shows that no single message is acceptable or understandable to all audiences, so it is important to have flexibility and options when communicating about this life-saving science. You can use CDC-developed materials, as well as materials developed by community groups such as Prevention Action Campaign, the organization responsible for the U=U campaign (undetected=untransmittable).<sup>17</sup>

*CDC estimates viral suppression is 100% effective for prevention of HIV sexual transmission.*<sup>20</sup>

**14**

CDC (2021). Starting the Conversation: HIV Treatment as Prevention. (Pg. 2) Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/stophivtogether/library/topics/treatment/brochures/cdc-hiv-1sht-treatment-brochure-transmission-prevention-provider.pdf>

**15**

CDC (2020). Let's Stop HIV Together. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/stophivtogether/library/hiv-treatment-works/palm-cards/cdc-hiv-together-treatment-palmcard-undetected.pdf>

**16**

Ibid. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/stophivtogether/library/hiv-treatment-works/palm-cards/cdc-hiv-together-treatment-palmcard-general.pdf>

**17**

CDC (2020). Let's Stop HIV Together Undetectable PSA Video. Retrieved from [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_ISialWwHcl&list=PLMuV5dq7YMFuaMfvhexWqHiFKJgiiMu\\_n&index=8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_ISialWwHcl&list=PLMuV5dq7YMFuaMfvhexWqHiFKJgiiMu_n&index=8)

**18**

CDC (2019). CDC Global U=U Toolkit. (Pg. 8) Retrieved from [https://58b1608b-fe15-46bb-818a-cd15168c0910.filesusr.com/ugd/de0404\\_dc7f983a5b33410fbdaf62e84a192aa9.pdf](https://58b1608b-fe15-46bb-818a-cd15168c0910.filesusr.com/ugd/de0404_dc7f983a5b33410fbdaf62e84a192aa9.pdf)

**19**

CDC (2019). Dear Colleague Letter from Dr. Eugene McCray. Retrieved from [https://58b1608b-fe15-46bb-818a-cd15168c0910.filesusr.com/ugd/de0404\\_966c29f826d4481abf8bbao69obdd439.pdf](https://58b1608b-fe15-46bb-818a-cd15168c0910.filesusr.com/ugd/de0404_966c29f826d4481abf8bbao69obdd439.pdf)

**20**

CDC (2019). Effectiveness of Prevention Strategies to Reduce the Risk of Acquiring or Transmitting HIV. Retrieved from <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/risk/estimates/preventionstrategies.html>



## **THE JOINT UNITED NATIONS PROGRAMME ON HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)**

### **Joint Statement Ministry of Public Health OF Thailand, World Health Organization (WHO) and Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS)**

#### ***People Living with HIV with an Undetectable Viral Load Cannot Transmit HIV Sexually***

The Ministry of Public Health of Thailand, UNAIDS and WHO endorse Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U).<sup>4</sup>

### **Undetectable = Untransmittable Public Health and HIV Viral Load Suppression**

A person with an undetectable viral load has no chance of passing on HIV.<sup>19</sup>

With 20 years of evidence demonstrating that HIV treatment is highly effective in reducing the transmission of HIV, the evidence is now clear that people living with HIV with an undetectable viral load cannot transmit HIV sexually.<sup>21</sup>

Access to antiretroviral therapy is transformative for people living with HIV. It enables people to regain their quality of life, return to work and enjoy a future with hope. For many people living with HIV, the news that they can no longer transmit HIV sexually is life-changing. In addition to being able to choose to have sex without a condom, many people living with HIV who are virally suppressed feel liberated from the stigma associated with living with the virus.<sup>19</sup>

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**21**

UNAIDS (2018). Undetectable = Untransmittable - Public Health and HIV Viral Load Suppression. Retrieved from [https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media\\_asset/undetectable-untransmittable\\_en.pdf](https://www.unaids.org/sites/default/files/media_asset/undetectable-untransmittable_en.pdf)



National Institutes  
of Health

## NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH (NIH)

### **HIV Undetectable=Untransmittable (U=U), or Treatment as Prevention**

People with HIV who achieve and maintain an undetectable viral load—the amount of HIV in the blood—by taking antiretroviral therapy (ART) daily as prescribed cannot sexually transmit the virus to others.<sup>22</sup>



National Institute of  
Allergy and  
Infectious Diseases

## NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ALLERGY AND INFECTIOUS DISEASES (NIAID)

### **The Science Is Clear—With HIV, Undetectable Equals Untransmittable**

#### *NIH Officials Discuss Scientific Evidence and Principles Underlying the U=U Concept*

In recent years, an overwhelming body of clinical evidence has firmly established the HIV Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U) concept as scientifically sound, say officials from the National Institutes of Health. U=U means that people living with HIV who achieve and maintain an undetectable viral load—the amount of HIV in the blood—by taking and adhering to antiretroviral therapy (ART) as prescribed cannot sexually transmit the virus to others.<sup>23</sup>

U=U can help control the HIV pandemic by preventing HIV transmission, and it can reduce the stigma that many people with HIV face.<sup>21</sup>

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**22**  
NIAID (2019). HIV Undetectable=Untransmittable (U=U), or Treatment as Prevention. Retrieved from <https://www.niaid.nih.gov/diseases-conditions/treatment-prevention>

**23**  
NIAID (2019). The Science Is Clear—With HIV, Undetectable Equals Untransmittable. Retrieved from <https://www.niaid.nih.gov/news-events/science-clear-hiv-undetectable-equals-untransmittable>



# UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (HHS)

## Guidelines for the Use of Antiretroviral Agents in Adults and Adolescents with HIV

All persons with HIV should be informed that maintaining a plasma HIV RNA (viral load) of <200 copies/mL, including any measurable value below this threshold value, with ART prevents sexual transmission of HIV to their partners (All). Patients may recognize this concept as Undetectable = Untransmittable, or U=U.<sup>24</sup>

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**24**

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2019). Panel on Antiretroviral Guidelines for Adults and Adolescents, Department of Health and Human Services. Guidelines for the Use of Antiretroviral Agents in Adults and Adolescents with HIV. Retrieved from <https://clinicalinfo.hiv.gov/en/guidelines/hiv-clinical-guidelines-adult-and-adolescent-arv/antiretroviral-therapy-prevent-sexual?view=full>

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LANCET

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### **Providers Should Discuss U=U with All Patients Living with HIV**

With evidence supporting undetectable=untransmittable (U=U) now overwhelming, providers should be routinely communicating the message to all of their patients living with HIV.<sup>25</sup>

### **Call to action: how can the US Ending the HIV Epidemic initiative succeed?**

A national culturally competent effort is needed to raise awareness of the U=U campaign as a promising approach to reduce HIV stigma, which has a powerful potentiating role in both acquisition risks and treatment challenges.<sup>26</sup>

Health-care professionals need to inform patients living with and affected by HIV about U=U to improve, first and foremost, personal health, as well as public health; sharing this information might greatly improve the social and emotional wellbeing of people living with HIV, reduce HIV stigma, reduce anxiety associated with HIV testing, and help motivate treatment uptake, treatment adherence, and engagement in care.<sup>23</sup>

Advocates should be equipped to use the so-called public health argument from U=U in advocacy to increase access and remove barriers to quality health care; ensuring people with HIV have the treatment and services they need to achieve and maintain an undetectable viral load not only saves lives, but also is an effective way to prevent new transmissions.<sup>23</sup>

### **Prioritising Pleasure and Correcting Misinformation in the Era of U=U**

Many people with HIV with an undetectable viral load have unnecessarily abstained from condomless sex, avoided sero-different partnering, and had anxiety about onward sexual transmission due to perceived HIV risk that is now known to be non-existent.<sup>27</sup>

Withholding information about U=U is thus rooted in behavioural assumptions and is scientifically unfounded.



Moreover, withholding such information violates medical ethics, perpetuates health inequities, and infringes on the sexual health and human rights of people with HIV. Health professionals and the broader public health community have an ethical responsibility to actively address misinformation about HIV transmission and disseminate the U=U message to all people.<sup>24</sup>

## U=U Taking Off in 2017

The fact that people infected with HIV who are virally suppressed cannot sexually transmit the virus to others is now accepted in the HIV/AIDS community as a result of accumulating evidence since the early 2000s.<sup>28</sup>

The fact that HIV treatment has advanced to the point that people infected with HIV can live full-length, healthy lives with zero chance of sexually transmitting the virus to others as long as they are on effective ART is a huge success.<sup>25</sup>

U=U is a simple but hugely important campaign based on a solid foundation of scientific evidence. It has already been successful in influencing public opinion, causing more people with HIV (and their friends and families) to comprehend that they can live long, healthy lives, have children, and never have to worry about passing on their infection to others.<sup>25</sup>

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### 25

Calabrese, S. K., & Mayer, K. H. (2019, April 1). Providers should discuss U=U with all patients living with HIV). Retrieved from [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanhiv/article/PIIS2352-3018\(19\)30030-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanhiv/article/PIIS2352-3018(19)30030-X/fulltext)

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Calabrese, S. K., Mayer, K. H., & Marcus, J. L. (2021). Prioritising pleasure and correcting misinformation in the era of U=U. *The Lancet HIV*, 8(3). Retrieved from [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanhiv/article/PIIS2352-3018\(20\)30341-6/fulltext#relAudio](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanhiv/article/PIIS2352-3018(20)30341-6/fulltext#relAudio)

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Hiv, T. L. (2017). U=U taking off in 2017. *The Lancet HIV*, 4(11). Retrieved from [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanhiv/article/PIIS2352-3018\(17\)30183-2/fulltext?elsca1=etoc](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanhiv/article/PIIS2352-3018(17)30183-2/fulltext?elsca1=etoc)

# THE JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION (JAMA)

## HIV Viral Load and Transmissibility of HIV Infection Undetectable Equals Untransmittable

In 2016, the Prevention Access Campaign, a health equity initiative with the goal of ending the HIV/AIDS pandemic as well as HIV-related stigma, launched the Undetectable = Untransmittable (U = U) initiative. U=U signifies that individuals with HIV who receive antiretroviral therapy (ART) and have achieved and maintained an undetectable viral load cannot sexually transmit the virus to others. This concept, based on strong scientific evidence, has broad implications for treatment of HIV infection from a scientific and public health standpoint, for the self-esteem of individuals by reducing the stigma associated with HIV, and for certain legal aspects of HIV criminalization.<sup>29</sup>

Because of the promise of U = U, achieving and maintaining an undetectable viral load becomes an aspirational goal and offers hope for persons with HIV. To enhance the overall success of the U = U concept, it is important to implement programs that help patients remain in care and address the challenges in their lives that result in their stopping therapy.<sup>26</sup>

The U = U concept provides incentives for individuals with HIV to seek, initiate, and adhere to ART. In addition, it adds incentives to efforts to control and ultimately end the HIV/AIDS pandemic because treatment as prevention is a critical tool in preventing the spread of HIV infection.<sup>26</sup>

The U = U concept also bridges the best of biomedical science with current concepts in behavioral and social science by removing the sense of fear and guilt that a person may be harming someone else, as well as the feeling of self-imposed and external stigma that many people with HIV experience. Finally, this concept has legal implications related to the criminalization of certain persons with HIV whereby criminal law is used to penalize alleged, perceived, or potential HIV exposure of one person to another.<sup>26</sup>

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**29**

Eisinger, R. W., Dieffenbach, C. W., & Fauci, A. S. (2019). HIV Viral Load and Transmissibility of HIV Infection. *JAMA*, 321(5), 451. Retrieved from <https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jama/article-abstract/2720997?alert=article>