

# U=U

## Undetectable = Untransmittable

**Having an undetectable viral load on HIV treatment (ART) stops sexual transmission.**

### What is U=U?

U=U means that someone with an undetectable HIV viral load on ART cannot transmit HIV sexually.

This is even without using condoms or PrEP.

Undetectable = Untransmittable.

### What does U=U involve?

The protection from ART depends on:

- Taking ART to get an undetectable viral load. In the UK this means getting to less than 50 copies/mL.
- Continuing to take your meds to keep your viral load undetectable.



*“U=U has transformed how we think about HIV. People with HIV can be confident there is zero risk to their sexual partners”*

Dr Laura Waters,  
Chair, British HIV Association

**UK guidelines say that all HIV doctors should talk to all their patients about how ART stops transmission.**

# U=U

## Why U=U means no risk?

This is because when viral load is undetectable there is too little HIV in sexual fluids for transmission to occur.

Sexual HIV transmission is related to viral load.

Being undetectable reduces this risk to zero.

## Does U=U work with all HIV drugs?

Yes. So long as viral load is undetectable the risk is zero.

## Does U=U work for everyone?

Yes, it works both gay and straight couples. It also covers all types of sex.

## Can I stop using condoms?

If HIV is the only concern, then in the context of U=U, there is no need to use condoms.

This is now a personal choice with your partner.

But condoms can reduce the risk of many STIs and they can prevent pregnancy.

## My partner still wants to use condoms?

Whether your partner is HIV positive or HIV negative, they have to decide what is right for them.

They might want to use condoms for other reasons, or they might still worry about HIV transmission.

Sometimes it takes time for someone to accept new evidence, especially after using condoms for many years.

## Do STIs affect U=U?

Based on the PARTNER study, U=U still works if, without realising it, one or both partners has an STI.

It is important to monitor and treat STIs, but they are unlikely to affect U=U.

*ART is not only good for your health – it also protects your partners if they are negative.*

*U=U means that you don't need to use condoms if you are only using them to stop HIV transmission.*

## **Is U=U widely accepted?**

Yes, leading HIV scientists and doctors agree with U=U.

This includes the British HIV Association (BHIVA), the International AIDS Society (IAS) and the US Center for Disease Control (CDC).

## **Will my doctor know about U=U?**

Yes. U=U has been headline news for at least two years. U=U is included in the BHIVA Standards for HIV Care.

If your doctor doesn't tell you about U=U, then ask them.

## **How long does viral load need to be undetectable?**

Once your viral load is undetectable (less than 50 copies/mL in the UK) your partner is not at risk.

This is so long as you keep taking your meds.

## **What if I miss my meds?**

Missing your meds once will not change U=U.

But missing meds for 2-3 days might be enough for viral load to become detectable.

Good adherence is essential.

## **What about viral load blips?**

Sometimes viral load can blip to between 50 and 200 copies/mL.

This does not affect U=U.

**UNDETECTABLE**  
**viral load means HIV IS**  
**UNTRANSMITTABLE**

## How do we know U=U is so effective?

The PARTNER studies tried to find whether HIV could be transmitted sexually when viral load was undetectable.

In PARTNER 1, almost 900 couples (both straight and gay) had sex more than 58,000 times without condoms.

In PARTNER 2, in gay men only, couples had sex more than 77,000 times without condoms.

There were no linked transmissions in either study.

## Does other research support U=U?

Yes. In 2008, the Swiss Statement first reported that ART could reduce the risk of transmission to zero.

Many other studies including the Rakai Cohort, HPTN 052 and Opposites Attract reported similar results. For more detail see: *The evidence for U=U: why negligible risk is zero risk*

[www.i-base.info/htb/32308](http://www.i-base.info/htb/32308)

## Does U=U apply to breastfeeding?

Although an undetectable viral load on ART reduces the risk from breastfeeding, it does not reduce the risk to zero.

There have been cases where babies have become HIV positive from breastfeeding, even when the mother had an undetectable viral load.

## Further information

i-Base has more information on U=U online. This includes a longer version of this factsheet.

It also includes information in Arabic, French, German, Mandarin, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Spanish and Turkish.

[www.i-base.info/u-equals-u](http://www.i-base.info/u-equals-u)

U=U was launched by the Prevention Access Campaign.

Currently, more than 1000 organisations globally have joined from over 100 countries.

[www.preventionaccess.org](http://www.preventionaccess.org)