



**Summary – The New York City Health Department urges medical providers to:**

- **Inform patients living with HIV that if they maintain an undetectable viral load, they have effectively no risk of transmitting HIV to their sexual partners.**
- **Encourage HIV-positive patients and their partners to discuss options for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STI) prevention, including HIV and STI treatment, condoms, PrEP and emergency PEP.**

November 28, 2017

Dear Colleague,

Antiretroviral medicines can effectively eliminate the risk of sexual transmission of HIV. We urge medical providers to educate their patients with HIV that “Undetectable is Untransmittable,” or “U = U.”

New clinical research has generated abundant evidence that individuals with undetectable viral loads do not sexually transmit HIV. [HPTN 052](#) was the first clinical trial to demonstrate no linked transmissions from people with suppressed viral loads to HIV-negative sexual partners. More recently, two observational cohort studies – [PARTNER](#) and [Opposites Attract](#) – followed male and heterosexual couples in which one partner was receiving antiretroviral treatment for HIV and the other partner was HIV-negative. During more than 1,800 couple-years of follow-up, male couples had anal sex without condoms [more than 34,000 times](#) and heterosexual couples had vaginal or anal sex without condoms [more than 36,000 times](#) with **zero** linked HIV transmissions documented when the HIV-positive partner was virally suppressed.

In August 2016, New York City (NYC) became the first jurisdiction in the United States to join the “U = U” campaign when the NYC Health Department signed a [consensus statement](#) affirming that people with HIV who have maintained an undetectable viral load for at least six months **do not** sexually transmit HIV. In September 2017, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and the [New York State Department of Health](#) agreed that people who maintain an undetectable viral load have **effectively no risk of** transmitting HIV to their sexual partners.

The Health Department asks providers to counsel patients with HIV that if they take their antiretroviral medicines every day and maintain an undetectable viral load, they will avoid damage to their body and immune system and will not transmit HIV to their sexual partners. Encourage people with HIV who are not being treated to start antiretroviral treatment to protect their health and to prevent transmission to their sexual partners. Refer patients who require support adhering to treatment or staying in care to programs such as the [Undetectables](#), the [Positive Life Workshop](#) and the [NYC Ryan White Care Coordination Program](#) (if eligible for Ryan White services).

Couples share the responsibility of preventing HIV. Counsel both HIV-positive patients and their partners on strategies to maintain a healthy, fulfilling and worry-free sex life, including the use of [condoms](#), [HIV treatment](#) and [PrEP \(Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis\) or PEP \(Post-Exposure Prophylaxis\)](#). Encourage HIV-positive patients to talk to their current or potential partners about what an

undetectable viral load is and that virally suppressed people do not sexually transmit HIV. Couples may decide that antiretroviral treatment for the HIV-positive partner provides sufficient protection against HIV transmission. HIV-negative partners may choose to take PrEP, particularly if they have other sexual partners; are unsure of their partner's viral load or their partner's ability to stay consistently suppressed; or feel more secure in their sex lives with the added protection of PrEP. Encourage all patients to get tested regularly for sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and emphasize that condoms play a fundamental role in preventing HIV and other STIs, and unintended pregnancy.

Past HIV prevention messaging has considered the sexual partners of people with HIV to be at a very high risk of HIV infection. This message stigmatizes people with HIV and discourages disclosure, HIV testing and treatment. Science has redefined safer sex to include prevention strategies such as HIV treatment, PrEP and PEP. People who are unaware of their status should get tested so they can make a prevention and treatment plan that fits their needs. NYC providers' efforts to promote treatment as prevention and "U = U" will help reduce HIV stigma, support healthy sexuality for all New Yorkers and help [end the epidemic](#) of HIV and AIDS in NYC.

For more information, see the Health Department's FAQ on "U = U" for [medical providers](#) and the [public](#).

Sincerely,



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