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Thanks to all of the professionals and people with HIV who have helped us to develop this leaflet.

For more information on this topic

- Read our 'Transmission facts' leaflet.
- Read our 'Undetectable viral load and HIV transmission' leaflet.
- Read our 'HIV, stigma and discrimination' booklet.

For information in other languages

- Visit www.aidsmap.com/languages

For more information about HIV

- Visit our website www.aidsmap.com
- Speak to an adviser at THT Direct **0808 802 1221**

Has this leaflet been useful to you?

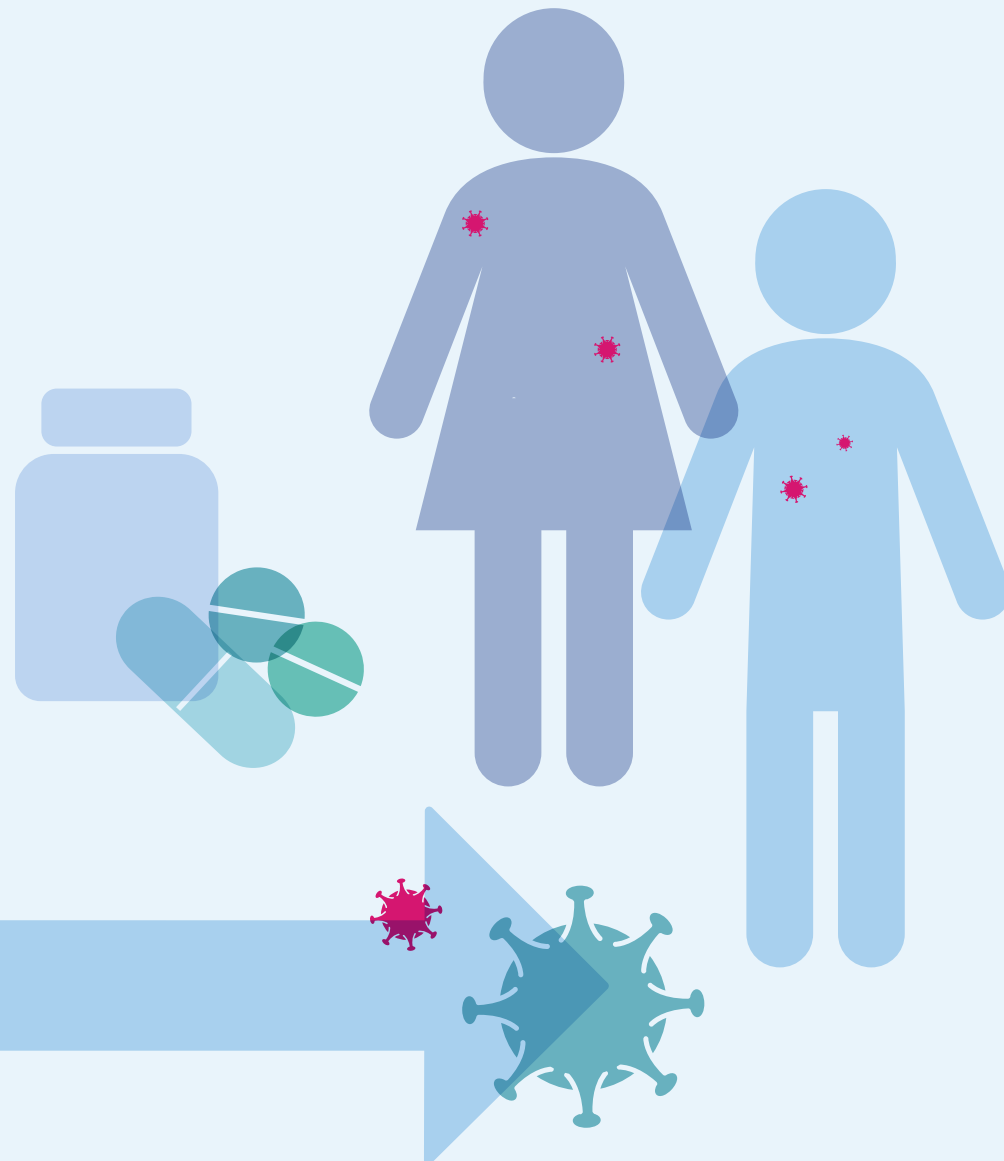
Please let us know what you think. Your feedback helps us to improve the services we offer.

You can contact us to find out more about the scientific research and information we have used to produce this leaflet.

We recommend that you discuss the information in this leaflet with a doctor or other health worker.

The basics

Myths and facts

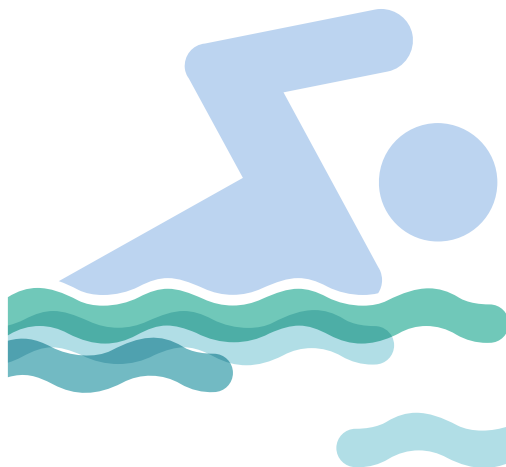


There's a lot of misunderstanding about HIV and AIDS. Not everything that you hear about HIV and AIDS is true.
This leaflet will help you separate the **myths from the **facts**.**

✗ **Myth: HIV is a death sentence.**

✓ **Fact: People living with HIV can live long and healthy lives, if they are on treatment.**

Treatment has really improved the health and overall quality of life of people living with HIV. However, they may have age-related illnesses at a younger age than other people. If people are diagnosed early, start treatment straight away and have the right support, they can expect to live a long and healthy life.



✗ **Myth: If you have sex with someone living with HIV, you will get HIV too.**

✓ **Fact: People taking effective HIV treatment cannot pass HIV on through sex.**

There are lots of ways to stop HIV being passed on. The most effective of all is for the person with HIV to take treatment and have an 'undetectable viral load'. This means that there is so little virus in the body that standard tests can't find any. When someone is undetectable, they can't transmit HIV to others. This is often referred to as 'Undetectable equals Untransmittable' (U=U).

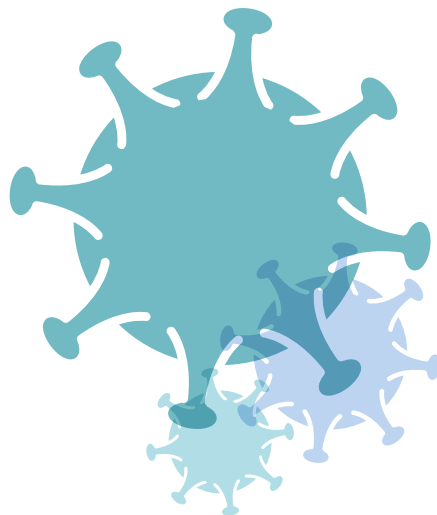
U = U
Undetectable equals Untransmittable

✗ **Myth: HIV and AIDS are the same thing.**

✓ **Fact: Every person who has AIDS has HIV, but many people with HIV will never have AIDS.**

HIV is the name of a virus that attacks the immune system. AIDS is an umbrella term for the illnesses that occur due to having untreated HIV for a long time.

Thanks to HIV treatment, far fewer people are developing AIDS. Most of those who develop AIDS are people who have not been tested for HIV and have never taken treatment.



✗ **Myth: Anti-HIV drugs do more harm than good.**

✓ **Fact: Without anti-HIV drugs, most people with HIV become seriously ill, develop AIDS and die at a young age.**

When HIV treatment is taken in good time, it allows people to live a long and healthy life. Most side-effects go away after a few weeks and have no long-term consequences. People taking anti-HIV drugs have their health carefully monitored to check they are doing well.



✗ **Myth: People with HIV can infect others during everyday social contact.**

✓ **Fact: HIV can only be passed on when one person's body fluids (for example, blood, semen and fluids from the vagina, but not saliva) get inside another person's body.**

This doesn't happen when you hug or talk to someone, or when you use the same fork, cup, plate, towel or bathroom as another person. So there is no risk of passing on HIV in these situations.



✗ **Myth: HIV is very hard to live with.**

✓ **Fact: People living with HIV can expect to live relatively normal lives.**

Due to advances in treatment, HIV does not stop people from carrying out their usual day-to-day activities. Most people can expect to take medication once a day and be seen by a specialist doctor twice a year.



✗ **Myth: Herbs and nutritional supplements can be as effective as anti-HIV drugs.**

✓ **Fact: Some herbs and supplements may be good for your general health, but they cannot prevent HIV from infecting new cells and spreading.**

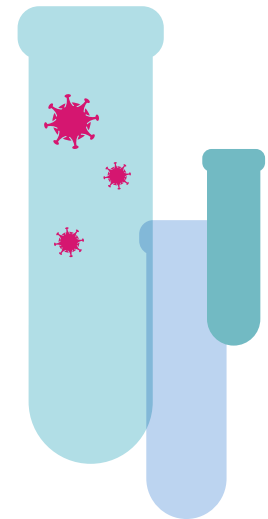
Only anti-HIV drugs have been proven, by scientific research, to prevent HIV from spreading in the body. Also, some herbal supplements stop anti-HIV drugs from working correctly. They can reduce the amount of the drug that gets into the blood, making it less effective against HIV.



✗ **Myth: You can be cured of HIV.**

✓ **Fact: Despite a lot of scientific research, there is still no cure for HIV.**

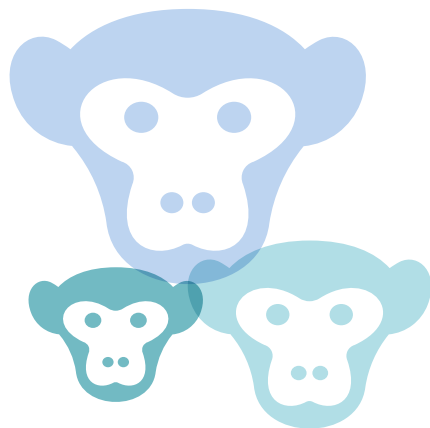
A handful of people have been cured of HIV. There were unique circumstances in these cases. Very few people can be cured in the same way. While HIV treatment can get rid of most of the HIV in the body, the virus never entirely disappears. Traces of it remain in some parts of the body. If you stop taking your anti-HIV drugs, HIV will start spreading throughout your body.



✗ **Myth: HIV is man-made.**

✓ **Fact: HIV is closely related to a similar virus found in chimpanzees. It has existed in humans since at least the 1950s.**

Scientists believe the virus crossed to humans when a man who was hunting chimpanzees was wounded and blood from a chimpanzee entered his bloodstream.



✗ **Myth: HIV treatment has terrible side-effects.**

✓ **Fact: Today's anti-HIV drugs have fewer and less severe side-effects than the drugs used in the past.**

Most side-effects are caused by the body getting used to a new drug and they go away after a few weeks. Severe, long-term side-effects are much less common. If one drug does cause you problems, your doctor can usually give you a different drug.



✗ **Myth: 'Health tourists' come to the UK to take advantage of NHS health care.**

✓ **Fact: There are many reasons why people move to the UK, but the NHS is rarely one of them.**

Research shows that very few people know what HIV care is available before they come to the country. There's also usually a long delay before people actually start to use health services.

By the way, HIV does not help a person to stay in the UK, apart from in exceptional circumstances. And people aren't deported because they have HIV.



✗ **Myth: A drug company has found a cure for HIV, but is keeping it secret to protect its profits.**

✓ **Fact: Scientists and drug companies have not yet discovered a cure for HIV.**

There are many different drug companies producing anti-HIV drugs and they are very competitive. If one of the companies could sell a cure, they would earn far more money than their competitors. Research continues.

