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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 'Undetectable viral load and HIV transmission' leaflet.
- Read our 'CD4, viral load and other tests' booklet.

## For information in other languages

- Visit [www.aidsmap.com/languages](http://www.aidsmap.com/languages)

## Other titles in The basics series

- Taking drugs on time
- CD4 and viral load
- Having a baby

## For more information about HIV

- Visit our website [www.aidsmap.com](http://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.

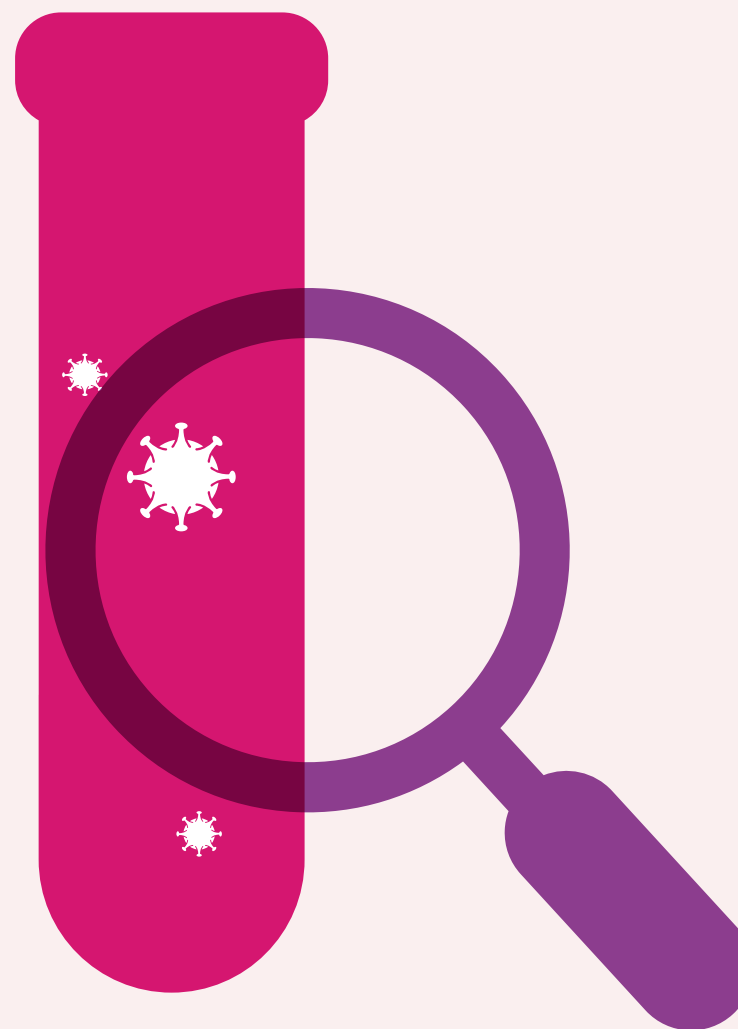
You can contact us to find out more about the scientific research and information we have used to produce this leaflet.

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

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# The basics

## Undetectable viral load



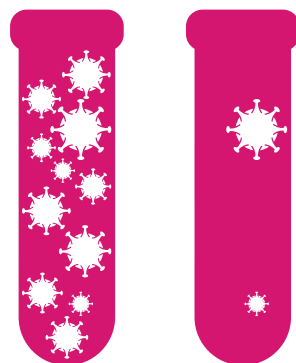
The aim of HIV treatment is to have a viral load that is 'undetectable'.

But what does that mean and why is it important?

- ① A viral load test tells you how much HIV there is in a drop of blood.



- ② Test results give you a good idea of whether the amount of HIV is high or low.



High

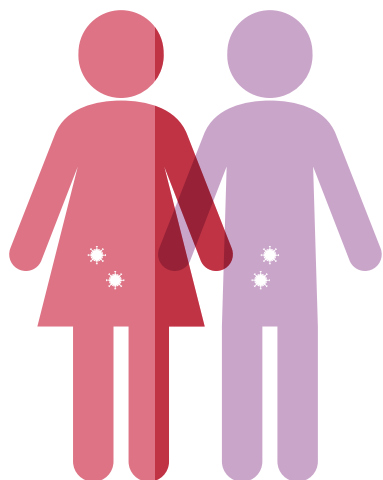
Low

- ③ However, the tests can't measure very small amounts of HIV. When you have very little HIV, you will be told that your viral load is 'undetectable'.

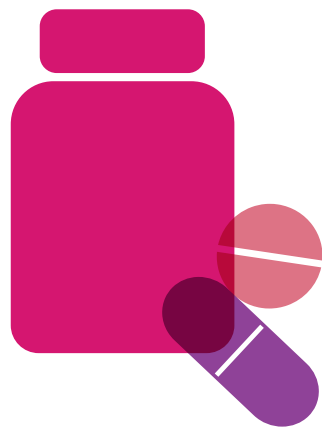
This means that there was so little HIV in one sample of blood that the test couldn't find any.



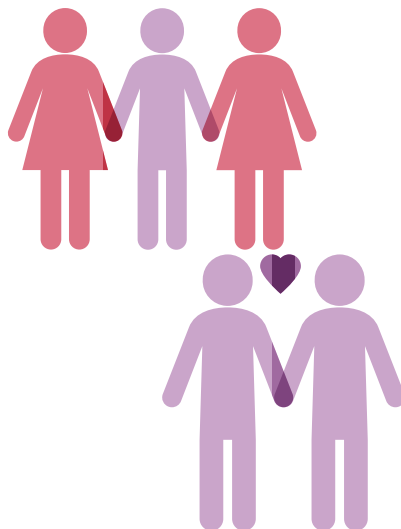
- ④ It doesn't mean that HIV has disappeared entirely. It will still be present in other parts of your body, like the gut.



- ⑤ The aim of HIV treatment is to have an undetectable viral load. This means that HIV is being kept under control.



- ⑥ An undetectable viral load prevents HIV from being passed on during sex.



### Important points

- If your viral load is undetectable, there is only a little HIV in your body. This means that your HIV treatment is working well.
- If you have had an undetectable viral load for at least six months, and you continue to take your treatment as prescribed, there is no risk of passing HIV on during sex.

### Notes

#### Why it's good to have an undetectable viral load

- If you have very little HIV, it won't be able to attack and weaken your immune system, which is the body's natural defence system.
- If your immune system is strong, you are less likely to get infections and illnesses.
- Several large studies have shown that people who take HIV treatment as prescribed and have an undetectable viral load do not pass HIV on during sex, even if they don't use condoms.
- This is what people mean when they say 'undetectable = untransmittable' (U=U).