

AND



EMBRACE LOVE

*HAVE GREAT SEX, AND KEEP YOUR
PARTNER(S) SAFE WHILE LIVING WITH HIV*

**A GUIDE TO MAINTAINING A
HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP AND
HAVING WORRY-FREE SEX.**

UNDERSTANDING THE BASICS

WHAT IS HIV?

Human Immunodeficiency Virus, or HIV, weakens the immune system by attacking it over time. It is important to seek treatment and to get into care immediately because the body is left open to other infections.

HOW DOES HIV SPREAD?

HIV is transmitted through bodily fluids such as blood, semen, rectal fluids, vaginal fluids or even breast milk. It is not spread through touching, kissing or oral sex.



NOT READY FOR SEX?

Although HIV will not stop you from having a healthy sex life, it's normal to worry about spreading it to your partner(s). If you decide you're not ready for sexual intercourse, consider these ways to experience intimacy:

- **Making out** – Remember, HIV is not transmitted through saliva. Therefore, you and your partner can enjoy a steamy make-out session.
- **Erogenous play** – Exploring and touching each other's pleasure points can create sensations. Finding your partner's spot can even lead to orgasms.
- **Masturbation** – Engaging in solo play or mutual masturbation can produce loads of pleasure. If you want a more intense experience, you can even add a toy to the mix. Just remember to sanitize toys before and after sharing.
- **Dry humping** – Keeping things dry and rubbing your genitals against your partner's body or genitals, or even a pillow or stuffed toy is a safe way to get one off.

IS THERE A CURE FOR HIV?

Although there is no cure for HIV, advancements in medication have made living a long, thriving life possible.

CAN I DATE WITH HIV?

Yes – your life is not over. You can still have a healthy love life and bright future by staying and getting into care. Medication is also available to limit the risk of infection if your partner is HIV-negative.



SHARING STATUSES

Disclosing your status can be difficult, especially when getting intimate with a partner, but it is important to be open and honest. Also, know that some states require you to share your status before having sex.

TIPS FOR SHARING YOUR STATUS:

- 1 Find a safe, private space to have the conversation.
- 2 Keep it simple – share only what you're comfortable telling.
- 3 Talk about prevention and encourage them to get tested.

4 Be prepared for any reaction and to answer questions.

5 Allow time for them to process the news.



REMEMBER:
U=U

*Info on page 11



MY PARTNER IS HIV

POSITIVE

In a **SEROCONCORDANT RELATIONSHIP**, both partners are HIV-positive. Although you both have a positive status, it is important to practice safe sex to limit the risk of other sexually transmitted infections (**STIs**).

Some people choose their sex partners based on their HIV status – **SEROSORTING**. For example, some HIV-positive men choose to only have sex with other men living with HIV to alleviate some of the stress caused by the misconceptions and stigmas that are sometimes associated with HIV.

Because your partner is also HIV positive, you may be less likely to use protection. However, although it is

rare, there is also the potential for HIV superinfection. This occurs when a person already living with HIV is exposed and infected with a different strain of the virus.

There is also a risk for other STIs, so you should still get tested regularly and seek treatment if necessary. Also, have frequent conversations with your partner since sexual health and sexual approach to sex can change.

If you and your partner both maintain an undetectable viral load, **you cannot transmit HIV to each other through sex.**



MY PARTNER IS HIV

NEGATIVE

A relationship with someone who is HIV-negative while you're positive is known as a **SERODISCORDANT RELATIONSHIP**. Whether you're in a straight, gay or bisexual serodiscordant relationship, there is a potential risk of HIV transmission.

By taking antiretroviral medications (**ART**), you can control the infection and are less likely to transmit it to an HIV-negative partner. In addition, your partner can be prescribed pre-exposure prophylaxis (**PrEP**) as a preventative medication to lower the risk of transmission.

PrEP is also recommended if you and your partner are interested in family planning and want to reduce the risk of passing on the virus.

It's still important to practice safe sex, such as condoms or dental dams, until reaching an undetectable status. If a condom breaks or isn't used, post—exposure prophylaxis (**PEP**) is a medication your partner can take within 72 hours of exposure to HIV. If prescribed PEP, your partner must take it daily for 28 days.



UNDERSTANDING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PrEP, PEP AND ART

PrEP

- Anti-HIV medication to prevent HIV negative individuals from becoming positive.
- PrEP is taken before you think you might be exposed to HIV.
- It is for people who are at risk of getting HIV from sex or injection drug use.
- When taken as prescribed PrEP reduces the risk of getting HIV from sex by 99%.

PEP

- PEP is taken within 72 hours after exposure to HIV and continued for 28 days to prevent infection.
- It is taken after you think you have been exposed to HIV during sex if you are concerned about someone's unknown status, sharing drug equipment or at work through needle stick.
- If taken correctly PEP can be highly effective but it does not prevent 100% of HIV infections.

ART

- A medicine treatment for HIV-positive people that minimizes the effects of HIV and reduces viral load and increases CD4 count. A higher CD4 number indicates a stronger immune system.
- It helps keep the immune system strong and able to fight against infections and other illnesses.



WHAT IS

U=U?

U=U STANDS FOR UNDETECTABLE=UNTRANSMITTABLE

If you are HIV positive and receiving treatment, medication can reduce your viral load, or the amount of HIV in your blood. Within six months of treatment, the infection can be suppressed and your viral load can reach an undetected level.

An undetectable viral load means that an HIV-positive person has such a low viral load that it doesn't show up on the tests used to measure it.

People living with HIV who continue treatment and have achieved an undetectable viral load cannot transmit the virus to their HIV-negative sexual partners.

Getting to be undetectable is the primary goal of HIV treatment.

If you take your HIV medication as prescribed and your viral load becomes undetectable, the virus can become untransmittable – meaning you won't spread it to others.



A photograph of two men walking outdoors on a sidewalk. The man on the left is wearing a black t-shirt, a straw hat with a blue band, and glasses. The man on the right is wearing a blue and white patterned button-down shirt and glasses. They are both smiling and looking towards the camera. The background shows trees and a building.

TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR *LIFE.*

It's possible for HIV transmission to occur when individuals are falling in love, getting close, or experiencing intense intimacy. These feelings may, for example, lead someone to stop using condoms before knowing their HIV status. If you choose not to use condoms or PrEP, but one person has undiagnosed or untreated HIV, the chance of HIV transmission is high.

Some couples or sex partners may choose to get tested together to be sure that they are HIV-negative before deciding not to use condoms with each other. It's a good idea to talk to your doctor about the "window period" where testing might not yet detect HIV.

Don't let HIV stop you from pursuing a romantic relationship or prevent you from being with someone who is HIV positive. By practicing safe sex, getting tested as needed, and having honest and open conversations, you can protect each other.






Embrace your status and have the sex that you want.

Take Control HIV has lots of information to guide you on your journey to help you and your partners think through the decisions that can impact your health.

TakeControlHIV.com

A photograph showing a person's hands clasped together, holding a black condom. The person is wearing a brown jacket. The background is a solid brown color.

This material is distributed by the Take Control HIV Community, a statewide collaboration of four organizations in partnership with Family Health Council of Central PA: AIDSNET, North Central District AIDS Coalition, PA Thrive Partnership and the United Way of Wyoming Valley.