

HIV TRANSMISSION

HIV is transmitted through **four** bodily fluids:

- blood, semen, vaginal fluid, breast milk

HIV can be spread during unprotected sex, through sharing of needles/sharps, and from mother to child during pregnancy, labour, and breast-feeding.

While there is no cure for HIV, it can be managed with medication.

ANTIRETROVIRAL THERAPY (ART)

Antiretrovirals (ARVs) or ART is the medicine used to treat HIV. These drugs stop the HIV virus from multiplying, or making more copies of itself, inside our body. ARVs work best if we start taking them before our immune system becomes weak.

ART does not completely remove HIV from the body. It reduces the amount of HIV virus in the blood, which is known as the viral load (VL).



ADHERENCE

Adherence is the ability to follow a treatment plan. This involves taking our ARVs:

- **at the right time**; at the same time every day.
- **at the right dose**; take all pills as advised, not taking some and leaving some.

HIV treatment can only work if we **always** take it properly.

If we have problems taking it, or have questions/concerns about our treatment/health, it's important to tell our nurses. We must make sure to get a refill from our health facility before we run out.

Tips for sticking to our treatment:

- **use reminders** (e.g., cell-phone alarms)
- **plan ahead** (when we travel or work late, take our pills with us)
- **get support** (loved ones can remind us to take our pills and go to our appointments)



SUPPORTING SOMEONE WITH HIV

- ✓ **Listen** to their needs
- ✓ **Learn** about HIV
- ✓ **Encourage** them to start HIV treatment as soon as possible
- ✓ **Support** medication adherence



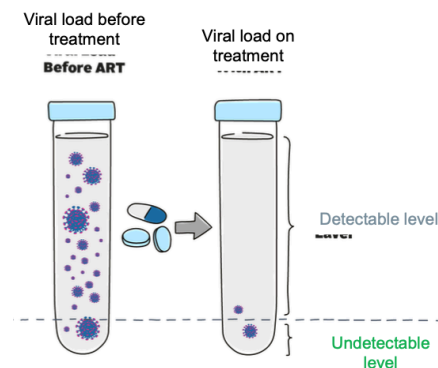
UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITABLE



With proper ART adherence, we can reach our goal of undetectable.

An undetectable VL means there are not enough copies of the virus in the body to transmit, or pass on, HIV to another person (**U=U**).

Even if VL is suppressed at the moment, we should continue taking our ARVs to keep it suppressed at all times. Stopping taking the ARVs will cause the virus to start multiplying again, leading to a high VL and a transmittable infection.



TOOLKIT: WHAT WE SHOULD NOT DO WITH OUR MEDICATION

- stop medicine for a day or many days (taking a “drug holiday”)
- take medicines at the wrong times
- take medicines without following instructions about food or diet
- miss appointments at the clinic, lab, or pharmacy
- share medicine with other people
- throw away unused medicine
- use ARVs for other purposes
- stop medications with a claim or miracle healing or a religious blessing
- use herbal medicines



A NOTE ON ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE

When we are taking any prescribed medicines, it is best to **avoid drinking alcohol, injecting drugs, or smoking cigarettes/marijuana.**

Alcohol and Drugs:

- **can make us forget to take our ARVs**
- **weaken our bodies**
- **negatively affect how our medicine works in our body**

OUR SUPPORT NETWORK

Family

- provides a loving, supportive environment; psychosocial support
- provides basic needs
- provides transport to clinics

School

- allows us to access medicines during lessons and go to appointments
- peers and teachers can help us address our fears and provide support

Professionals

- counselors/psychologists can help us work through issues we cannot tackle alone or with loved ones

Spiritual Community

- give us strength and meaning

Ourselves

- spend time by ourselves to reflect and relax



WHY HIV TREATMENT?

With treatment, we can bring the amount of HIV virus to an **undetectable level**, which keeps us healthy & prevents the spread of HIV to others.



UNDERSTAND OUR TREATMENT BETTER

We've got the power

www.tonata.org