

### Key messages:

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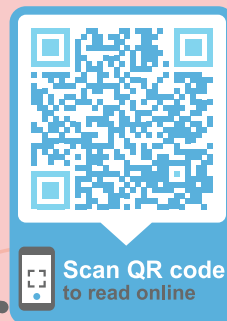
Effective HIV treatment reduces the amount of HIV in your body fluids

2

Once the amount of virus in your body fluids becomes so low that it is “undetectable”, you cannot pass on HIV to your sex partner, which is “untransmittable”

3

Good adherence to HIV medicine is essential to achieve and maintain **U=U**



香港愛滋病醫學會

HONG KONG SOCIETY FOR HIV MEDICINE



### What is viral load?

Viral load is a measure of the amount of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) in your body fluids. Usually, viral load in blood is measured and monitored.

### How often should viral load be tested?

Viral load in blood will be tested every 3 to 6 months in stable condition to ensure that the HIV medicine is effective.

### What is “undetectable” viral load?

The amount of HIV in your body fluids is so low that standard blood tests cannot detect it, which can be achieved by taking HIV medicine.

### What is a “viral load blip”?

Even if you take HIV medicine properly, you may sometimes have a small and transient increase in viral load called “blip” which will return to undetectable levels afterwards. You will not pass on HIV due to the presence of these blips.

### What is Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U)?

Once the amount of HIV in your body fluids becomes so low that it is “undetectable”, you cannot pass on HIV to your sex partner.

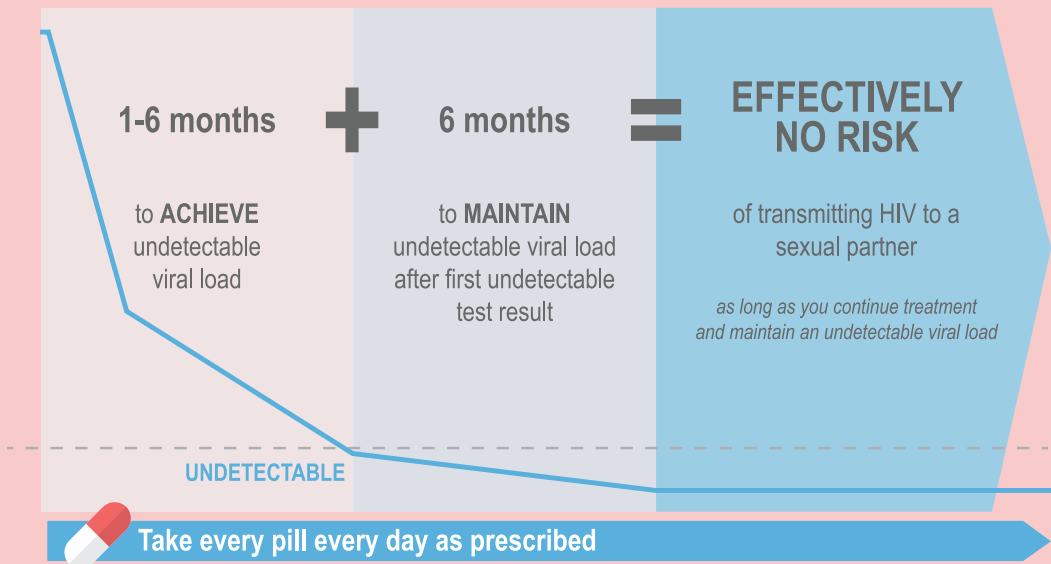
### What are the evidences to support U=U?

In 3 large multinational research studies, there was no HIV transmission from a sexual partner with an undetectable viral load in a total of 93,880 acts of condomless sex when the HIV-negative partner was not taking pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). This means the risk of transmission is statistically equivalent to zero.



## After beginning HIV treatment, how long does it take to achieve U=U?

Most people living with HIV achieve an undetectable viral load within 1 to 6 months after beginning treatment. After maintaining an undetectable level for 6 months more, there is effectively no risk of transmitting HIV to your sex partner.



## Does it affect U=U if I forget to take HIV medicine?

Even though the laboratory test could not detect HIV virus in the blood sample, it does not mean the virus has disappeared from the body. The viral load will rebound if you do not take the HIV medicine properly.

It is important to take every pill every day to maintain durably undetectable status. Good adherence is essential for U=U. If you miss your dose of HIV medication for several days or more, it is important to check viral load again to confirm it is still undetectable. Good adherence can prevent drug resistance as well.

## What are the other potential benefits of understanding U=U by people living with HIV and the public?

There is growing body of evidence that a better understanding of U=U improves treatment adherence and outcomes. It also helps to reduce stigma and discrimination toward people living with HIV.

## How do I explain U=U with my partner who is HIV negative?

When undetectable viral load is achieved and sustained, you do not have to worry about passing the virus to your partner.

Involving your partner in the discussion for a better understanding of U=U is mutually beneficial. However, it may take some time for the HIV-negative partner to accept the concept of U=U. Your partner may still want to use condoms due to different reasons. Healthcare workers can help to explain to your partner too.




## Does undetectable mean that the people living with HIV are cured of HIV?

Even when viral load is undetectable, HIV is still present in your body and remains inactive inside a small number of cells in your body. HIV will multiply and viral load will be detected again if HIV medicine is stopped.

## When viral load is undetectable, will the HIV test become negative?

No, you will still test positive for HIV. An antibody test is usually done for the screening of HIV. Antibodies to HIV are still present even though the viral load becomes undetectable.



## Does HIV treatment protect me from other sexually transmitted infections?

HIV treatment cannot prevent other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Condom use is an effective way to reduce the risk of STIs. Vaccination can also prevent some STIs, including hepatitis A, hepatitis B and human papillomavirus (HPV).

## Does U=U apply to the non-sexual transmission of HIV?

It is important to note that U=U only applies to sexual transmission.

The risk of HIV transmission to the baby is about 0.1% when HIV-positive women maintain an undetectable viral load during pregnancy. Although HIV medicine reduces the risk of HIV transmission during breastfeeding, this risk is not zero and thus formula feeding is advised. For needle sharing, the degree of risk reduction due to undetectable viral load is still unclear.

