

Reporting on HIV:

a quick reference guide



There has been incredible medical progress on HIV, but public attitudes haven't kept up with the science. We are keen to work with journalists and broadcasters to change this, whether that's through analysing the latest data, amplifying the voices of people living with HIV, or through fictional storylines.

This is a quick reference guide to answer common questions on reporting about HIV and help make your reporting as accurate as possible. It can't cover everything, so please ask if you're unsure or want more information.

What is it like living with HIV in the UK?

1. Treatment for HIV is highly effective. It stops the virus attacking your immune system and reduces the virus to such low levels that it [cannot be passed on](#), even during condomless sex.
2. People living with HIV [frequently say stigma around HIV](#) is a bigger issue in their lives than the virus itself.
3. We have all the tools we need to end new HIV cases, without a vaccine or a cure: PrEP that prevents you acquiring HIV, rapid HIV tests that can be taken at home, and effective medication that means it can't be passed on.
4. The Government is aiming to end new cases of HIV in the UK by 2030.

Language guide

Please try to avoid	Better terms to use
HIV positive person Person infected with HIV HIV patient HIV victim	Person living with HIV <i>Put the person first not the virus, and avoid words which may be disempowering or stigmatising like "infected" or "patient"</i>
AIDS HIV/AIDS	HIV or late-stage HIV/advanced HIV (where relevant) <i>AIDS is term used historically to describe a collection of illnesses caused by HIV that weaken a person's immune system.</i> <i>The term AIDS isn't used much by UK doctors now. Instead, they talk about late-stage or advanced HIV. It may still be appropriate to use the term AIDS in an international or historical context. Saying AIDS-related illnesses may be appropriate when mentioning a death, e.g. "Terry Higgins was one of the first people in the UK to die of AIDS-related illnesses."</i> <i>HIV and AIDS are not the same thing and should not be used interchangeably. If you are saying <u>AIDS</u>, make sure you know why.</i>
Infected/Caught Spread	Acquired Transmitted/ passed on <i>These are less morally loaded terms.</i>
Ending HIV by 2030	Ending new cases of HIV by 2030 <i>People will still be living with HIV for a long time after we end new cases.</i>

Other useful terms

PrEP (short for pre-exposure prophylaxis) is a drug taken by HIV-negative people that prevents you from acquiring HIV. It comes in many forms including pill and injectable.

PEP (short for post-exposure prophylaxis) is a pill taken after sex if you think you may have been exposed to HIV, which will stop the virus taking hold in your system.

Can't pass it on captures the message that people living with HIV cannot pass on the virus once their viral load is suppressed by effective medication, you might hear this referred to as undetectable equals untransmittable (U=U).

General advice

HIV can affect anyone. Some communities have been more impacted by HIV in the UK, including gay and bisexual men and people of Black African ethnicity. However, HIV doesn't discriminate, and anyone can receive a diagnosis.

Profiling people living with HIV. If you're interviewing or profiling someone living with HIV, please do not focus overly on how exactly they acquired it. It can be stigmatising and invasive (would you ask someone who was pregnant "how did you get it?").

Get in touch

We're here to help and always happy to have a chat. If you want advice or have any questions, you can reach our press team at press@tht.org.uk or 07957 812 691.

Sources and further guidance

[People First Charter](#)

[National AIDS Trust, Reporting HIV: How to get it right](#)

[George House Trust, HIV language guide](#)

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