

#GETtoZERO

HIV

**Language
Guide**

#GETtoZERO

WORDS

MATTER

The language we use matters. When talking about HIV, certain words and language may reinforce outdated stereotypes or information about the virus.

We have compiled a handy do's and don'ts list of language to use when talking about HIV, to equip you with the tools to end HIV stigma and help Scotland **#GETtoZERO**.

DON'T SAY X

AIDS

(when referring the virus to HIV)

DO SAY ✓

**ADVANCED OR
LATE STAGE HIV**

WHY?

AIDS itself is not a condition.

It is a range of conditions, or a syndrome, that occurs when a person's immune system is weakened by HIV transmission.

DON'T SAY X

TO CATCH HIV

TO BE INFECTED WITH HIV

DO SAY ✓

**TO BE DIAGNOSED WITH HIV
TO CONTRACT HIV
TO TRANSMIT HIV**

WHY?

AIDS cannot be transmitted or caught.

People can contract HIV.

HIV can be transmitted, but it is not genetic.

DON'T SAY X

DO SAY ✓

BODILY FLUIDS

**BLOOD, AMNIOTIC FLUID,
SEMEN, PRE-
EJACULATION, VAGINAL
FLUIDS, RECTAL FLUIDS,
BREAST MILK**

WHY?

HIV can only be transmitted through some body fluids.

It is important to be as specific as you can, as the term “body fluids” covers all fluids and not just those relating to HIV transmission.

DON'T SAY X

DO SAY ✓

**VICTIMS, SUFFERERS,
CONTAMINATED,
SICK**

PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV

WHY?

Some people with HIV feel that these terms imply that they are powerless. Unhelpful terms negatively define people with HIV by the condition and can spread highly stigmatising ideas about people living with the virus.

DON'T SAY X

**AIDS/HIV PATIENT,
PATIENT**

DO SAY ✓

**PERSON WITH HIV,
PERSON LIVING WITH HIV,
HIV POSITIVE PERSON**

WHY?

Outside of a clinical context, a person is not a patient.

“Patient” implies the person is in a constant state of unwell, which can be misleading and discouraging.

DON'T SAY X

**POSITIVES, HIVers,
AIDS OR HIV
CARRIER(S)**

DO SAY ✓

**HIV-POSITIVE
PEOPLE/PERSON,
PEOPLE/PERSON WITH HIV,
PEOPLE/PERSON WITH
ADVANCED HIV**

WHY?

A person is not HIV or AIDS.

A person lives with HIV once they contract the virus.

AIDS itself is very rare today; some clinicians use “advanced HIV” in situations where someone has not benefitted from HIV medication or is undiagnosed.

KEY

TERMS

HIV - HIV is a virus that attacks the body's immune system. If HIV is left untreated, it can lead to AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome). There is currently no cure, however with effective treatment HIV can be controlled and a person living with HIV can lead a long and healthy life.

AIDS - AIDS (acquired immune deficiency syndrome) is the name used to describe a number of potentially life-threatening infections and illnesses that happen when your immune system has been severely damaged by HIV. While AIDS cannot be transmitted from one person to another, the HIV virus can.

BBV – BBV (bloodborne virus) are transmitted through contact with infected blood. Hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV are BBVs.

ART - ART (anti-retroviral therapy) refers to a variety of HIV treatment which can suppress the HIV viral load in someone's blood and therefore mean they cannot pass HIV onto others. Examples of ART include abacavir, emtricitabine, and nevirapine.

PrEP - PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) is a highly effective preventative medication people can take regularly to reduce chances of getting HIV

KEY

TERMS

PEP – PEP (Post Exposure prophylaxis) is a combination of HIV drugs that can stop the virus taking hold. It can be used after you believe you have been exposed to HIV.

U=U - Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U) When a person is living with HIV and is on effective treatment, it lowers the level of HIV (the viral load) in the blood to a level low enough to be classed as 'undetectable'. When you reached this stage, HIV cannot be passed on sexually, so it is 'untransmittable.'

Viral load - Viral load is a measure of how much HIV is in someone's body. The higher the viral load the more infectious someone is.

**#GETtoZERO THE
WORDS**

WE USE

MATTER

People living with HIV have preferences on the language they use to describe their lived experience, so this guide may not cover every term or phrase.

Learn more about the **#GETtoZERO** campaign at waverleycare.org/gettozero

Sources

George House (HIV Language Guide, 2022).
CDC (A Guide to Talking about HIV).