

THE IMPOSSIBLE BECOMES POSSIBLE BETTER UNDERSTAND

$$U=U$$

UNDETECTABLE

UNTRANSMITTABLE



Condoms



Testing



Treatment

INTRODUCTION U=U

Today, explaining the message of **Undetectable = Untransmittable** (U=U) is fundamental both for **people living with HIV (PLWHIV)** and for the general public.

In fact, U=U permits :

- to no longer transmit HIV during sexual intercourse;
- to have children without the use of medically assisted delivery methods;
- to change the perception of PLWHIV among the general public and to reduce the stigmatisation.

This is why the group of PLWHIV of «L'Espace Mandela», a project of the Plate-Forme Prévention Sida, has chosen to jointly develop a brochure on U=U adapted to the needs of PLWHIV for whom information is sometimes difficult to understand. This tool would also help to improve communication between the patients and healthcare professionals on this subject.

This brochure aims to improve PLWHIV's knowledge on the treatment and how it works, the viral load, the immune system and the concept of U=U. It will allow them to better understand the impact of U=U on their quality of life in general and on their emotional and sexual life in particular.

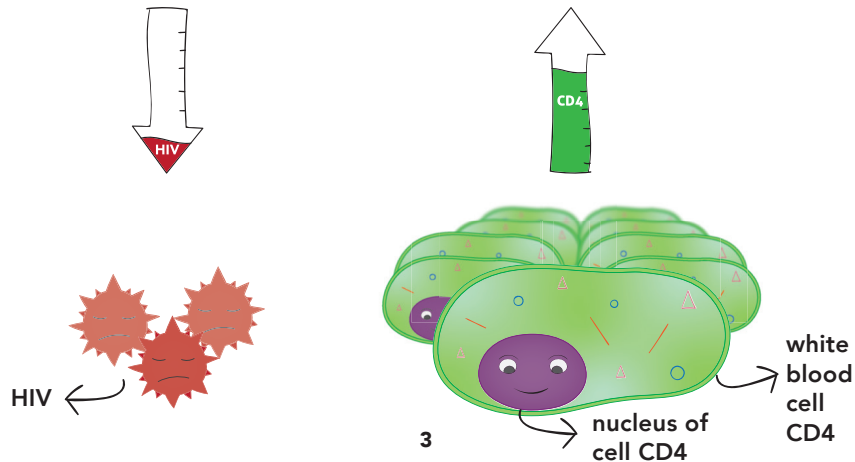
I AM STARTING MY TREATMENT

What is the purpose of my HIV treatment?

It reduces **my viral load** and strengthen **my immune system** (especially the « white blood cells CD4 »)

Reduce the viral load:
less of the virus (HIV)

Strengthen the immune system:
more of the CD4 cells

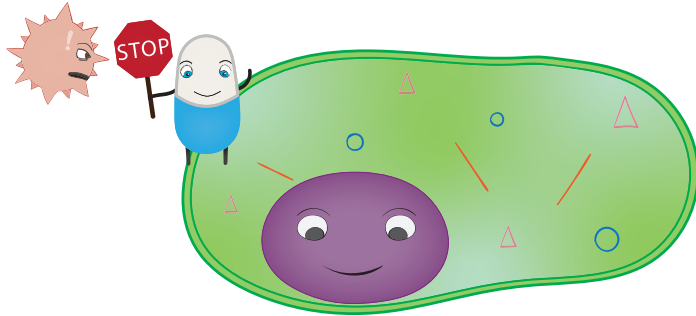


How does my treatment work ?

→ Treatments work in different ways depending on the molecules they contain.

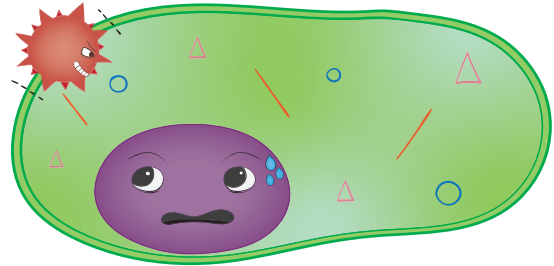
→ The treatment prevents the virus from entering the CD4 cell

WITH TREATMENT



The treatment prevents the virus from entering the CD4 cell

WITHOUT TREATMENT

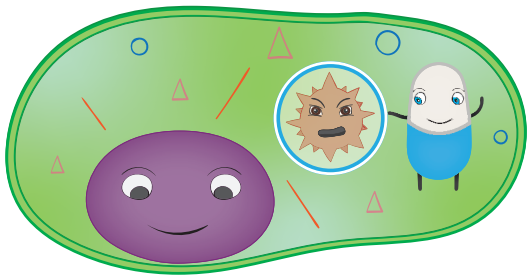


HIV enters into the CD4 cell

How does my treatment work ?

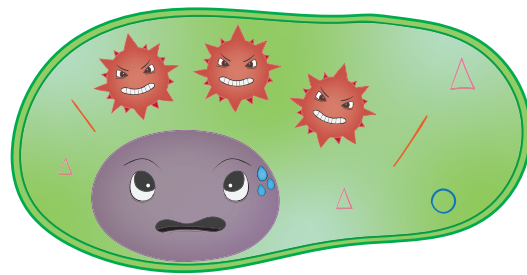
→ The treatment prevents the virus from reproducing

WITH TREATMENT



The treatment prevents the virus from reproducing itself within the CD4 cell

WITHOUT TREATMENT

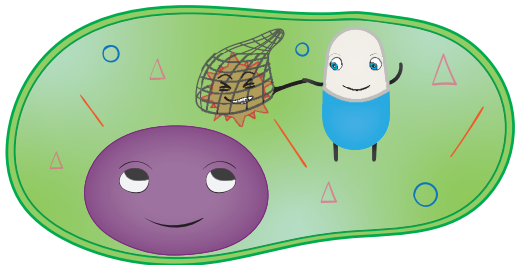


HIV reproduces within the CD4 cell

How does my treatment work ?

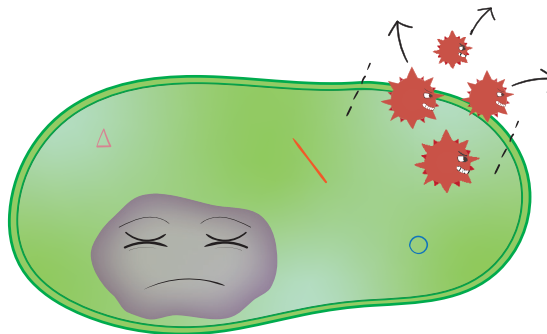
→ The treatment prevents the virus from leaving the cell and infecting other CD4 cells

WITH TREATMENT



The treatment prevents the virus from leaving the CD4 cell

WITHOUT TREATMENT

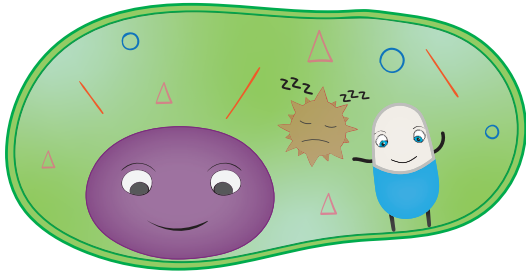


HIV leaves the CD4 cell

How does my treatment work ?

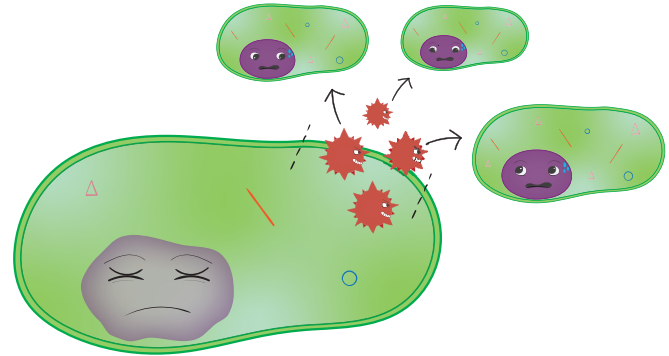
→ The treatment puts the virus to sleep. Once the virus is asleep, I can no longer transmit HIV during sexual intercourses.

WITH TREATMENT



The treatment puts the virus to sleep the CD4 cell

WITHOUT TREATMENT



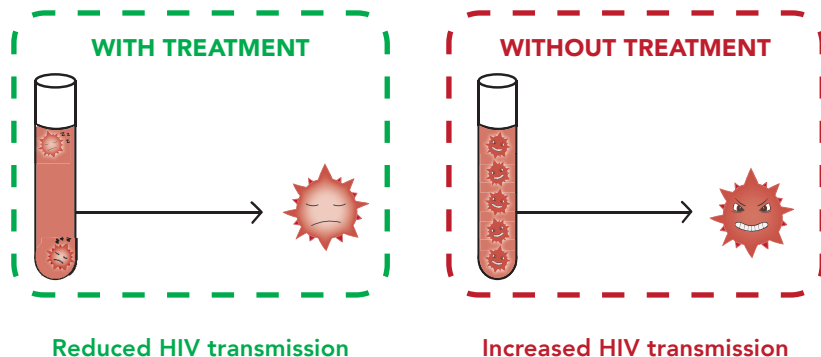
HIV will infect other CD4 cells

What is the viral load ?

The viral load is the **amount of virus (HIV)** in my blood.

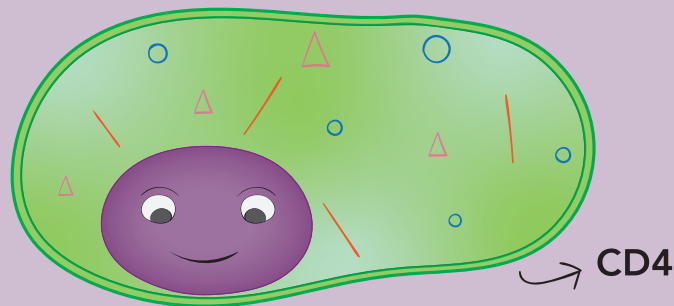
Before starting my treatment, my viral load (amount of virus in my blood) is usually very high. **At this time, the risk of HIV transmission is also very high.**

My treatment works to decrease my viral load. **When my viral load decreases, the risk of transmission also decreases.**



What is the immune system ?

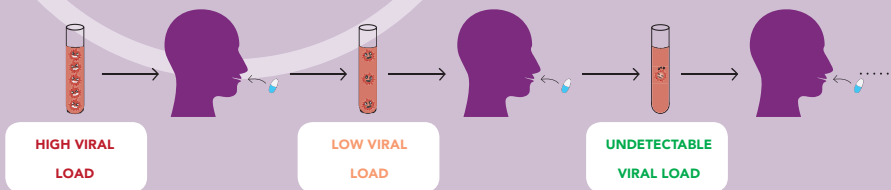
It is my **body's defence system against diseases**. CD4s are part of the family of white blood cells, the cells responsible for this defence. **It is the CD4s that the virus will infect.**



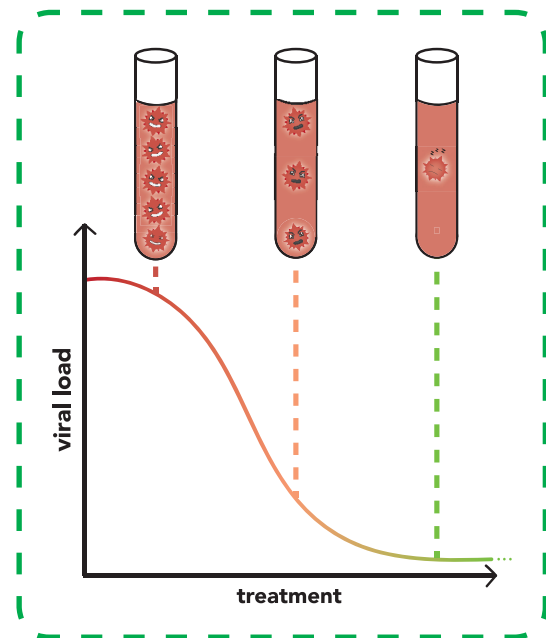
Before starting my treatment, my immunity (amount of CD4 cells) is sometimes very low. **By preventing the virus from replicating, the medicines can increase the number of CD4 cells in my body and thus strengthen my immune system.**

What does it mean to have an undetectable viral load ?

This is when the amount of virus present in my blood is very low. In fact, **if I take my treatment correctly and follow the doctor's instructions, the amount of virus will decrease until the virus can no longer be detected (be seen) in the blood** with current laboratory equipment (20 or 50 copies of virus per millilitre of blood - 1 copy = 1 virus). It is then said that the viral load is **undetectable**.



Be careful, this does not mean that there are no more viruses in my body, they are still present in my body but in very small quantities. The virus is then less active and remains asleep.

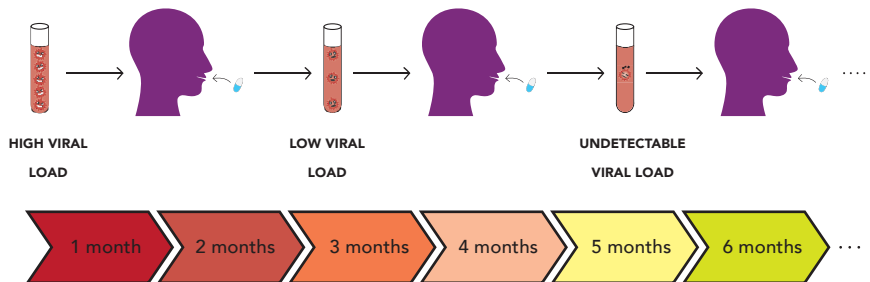


Be careful, having an undetectable viral load does not mean that I am cured of HIV. But it reduces the impact of the HIV virus on my body and increases my life expectancy and quality of life. My life expectancy is then similar to that of people who are not infected with the virus. Under treatment, I can lead a normal life.

How to reach an undetectable viral load ?

The only way to reach an undetectable viral load is **to correctly take my antiretroviral medicines, without stopping, forgetting, increasing or decreasing the number of pills.**

From the moment I start taking my treatment, it will take **3 to 6 months for the viral load to become undetectable**. With new medicines, the time frame could be reduced.

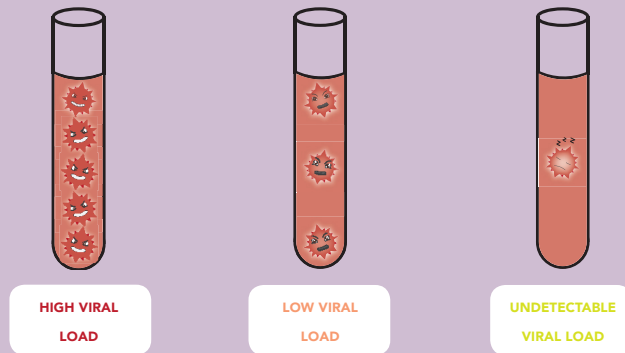


How do I know if my viral load is undetectable ?

To find out if my viral load is undetectable, I **need to take a blood test (viral load measurement) to measure the amount of virus in my blood.**

The doctor will assess if :

- there is a lot of the virus = **high viral load**
- there is less of the virus = **low viral load**
- there are very few of the virus = **undetectable viral load**



I AM UNDETECTABLE SO I AM UNTRANSMITTABLE !

What is untransmittable ?

Intransmissible signifie que je ne peux plus transmettre le VIH.

What are the advantages of U=U ?

U=U allows to:

- to eliminate the risks of transmission of the virus to my partner during sexual intercourse. It is no longer necessary to use condoms to prevent the transmission of HIV. Be careful, the condom is the only way to protect yourself against other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)
- to have children without them being infected. I can naturally have them without medical assistance. However, I could not breastfeed (there is still a small amount of virus in breast milk)

HOW TO MANAGE U=U ?.....UVL

Can I remain undetectable permanently ?

YES, if I take my treatment correctly at a set time, without forgetting it, without taking more or less tablets or stopping my treatment without my doctor's advice. If I don't respect all this, I could become detectable and capable of transmitting the virus again.

In fact, I must follow my doctor's recommendations to remain undetectable at all times and have my viral load checked regularly (by blood test).

Am I cured with an undetectable viral load ?

NO, when I have an undetectable viral load, the virus is always present in my body, but in very small quantities. **I remain HIV-positive and my test will always be positive when I am tested for HIV.**

Nowadays, HIV is considered, in Belgium, as **a chronic disease that cannot be cured but can be treated.**

If my viral load is undetectable, is it important to continue measuring CD4 counts ?

YES, CD4 counts and viral load are both important. They provide my doctor with essential information for my medical follow-up.

The purpose of HIV treatment is to make my viral load undetectable (very low) and to strengthen my immune system by increasing the CD4 count.

What if my viral load becomes detectable again ?

If the treatment is not taken correctly, the virus may develop resistance to the medicines or become detectable again. The doctor may decide to change my treatment, request additional tests, check with me to see if I am taking my medicines properly and if I am still in good conditions to remain undetectable.

When the viral load rises, the risk of HIV transmission increases and another means of protection must be used (condom for one of the two partners or PrEP for the HIV-negative partner).

MY EXPERIENCE WITH U=U



"Before I started my treatment, I isolated myself, all I could think about was death. The medication allowed me to get out of my isolation and today with U=U, I feel more reassured."
G.

"Before U=U, I was stuck in my sexual and emotional life. I had trouble getting erections because I was afraid of infecting the other person. Now with U=U, I am reassured and sexually satisfied. I feel half cured."
J.



"Although U=U is good news and a hope for the future, telling my partner about my HIV status has been very difficult. I preferred to wait until the relationship was lasting before telling him."
P.



"Despite U=U, I did not disclose my HIV status to my family because of the fear of a moral judgment that might be made against me."
H.

"I am afraid to announce my HIV status at work given the reactions they have had to other diseases. I am not sure that my employer and colleagues are well informed about HIV in general and about U=U in particular."
A.



"When I was received at the centre for asylum seekers, I went to the hospital. The doctor got angry because I didn't tell him I was HIV positive. I told him my viral load was undetectable, but despite that, he wasn't reassured."
G.



- With U=U, I do not infect my partner during sex without a condom, but this does not protect me from other STIs.
- With U=U, the virus is still present in my body but in small quantities.
- U=U does not allow breastfeeding (because HIV can be transferred to breast milk even if the mother is on effective HIV treatment).
- U=U does not mean I am cured.
- I can become detectable again if I don't take my treatment correctly (for example, because I have side effects).
- I don't stop my treatment on my own, I have to talk to my doctor about it because it can increase my viral load.

U=U THE IMPOSSIBLE BECOMES POSSIBLE

USEFUL CONTACTS.....



AIDS Prevention Associations

Plate-Forme Prévention Sida Espace Mandela Action Plus

Place de la Vieille Halle aux Blés, 29 - 1000 Bruxelles
02/733 72 99
www.preventionsida.org - www.preventionist.org

Vzw Lhiving

Poolstraat 2 - 1210 Brussel
02/201 14 19
www.lhiving.be

Projet Nyampinga

Rue des Sports, 19 - 1348 Louvain-la-Neuve
0498/71 30 62

SIDA-IST Charleroi-Mons

Boulevard Zoé Drion, 1 - 6000 Charleroi
071/92 54 10
www.sida-charleroi-mons.be

Sida Sol ASBL

Rue des Fontaines-Roland, 29 - 4000 Liège
04/287 67 00
www.sidasol.be

Le SASER

Rue Docteur Haibe 4 - 5002 Namur
081/77 68 20
www.province.namur.be/saser

HIV-SAM Project

Nationalestraat 155 - 2000 Anvers
03/247 64 81 • 0479/50 03 98
www.hivsam.be

Muungano Boekenberglei

Charles de Costerlaan 21/G11 - 2050 Antwerpen
0488/33 37 27 • 0479/40 03 89
www.hivsam.be/

Sensoa

Franklin Rooseveltplaats 12 - 2060 Antwerpen
03/238 68 68
www.sensoa.be/

Ex Aequo

Rue des Pierres 29 - 1000 Bruxelles
02/736 28 61
www.exaequo.be

HIV Reference Centres

Centre de référence VIH de l'UCL -Hôpital St-Luc

Avenue Hippocrate, 10 - 1200 Bruxelles
02/764 21 98 • 02/764 19 02

Centre de référence VIH de l'ULB - CHU St-Pierre - CETIM

Rue Haute, 322 - 1000 Bruxelles
02/535 31 77

Centre de référence VIH Hôpital Erasme

Route de Lennik, 808 - 1070 Bruxelles
02/555 46 88

Centre de référence VIH de l'UZ VUB

avenue du Laarbeek, 101 - 1090 Bruxelles
02/ 477 60 01

Centre de référence VIH - CHU Charleroi

Chaussée de Bruxelles, 140 - 6042 Lodelinsart
071/92 31 07

Centre de référence VIH CHU Dinant Godinne

Avenue Dr. Gaston Thérassé, 1 - 5530 Yvoir
081/42 20 81 • 081/42 38 00

Centre de référence VIH du CHU de Liège (5ème étage)

Quai Godefroid Kurth, 45 - 4020 Liège
04/270 31 90

HIV Referentie centrum Instituut voor Tropische Geneeskunde

Kronenburgstraat 43/3 - 2000 Antwerpen
03/247 64 65

HIV Referentie centrum AZ Sint Jan-Brugge – Ostende AV

Ruddershove 10, 8000 Brugge
050/45 23 12

HIV Referentie centrum Gent

G.Heymanslaan, entrée 69 (P2, route 690) - 9000 Gent
09/332.23.50

HIV Referentie centrum, Campus Gasthuisberg

Herestraat, 49 - 3000 Leuven
016/34 47 75

HIV Referentie centrum Jessa Zeikenhuis Campus Virga Jesse

Stadsomvaart, 11 - 3500 Hasselt
011/33 55 11

Other Links

CATIE : www.catie.ca/

SERONET : www.seronet.info/

UNIA : www.unia.be

Action Traitement : www.actions-traitements.org

Aides : magazine Remaides : www.aides.org/Remaides

ONUSIDA : <http://www.unaids.org>

Aidsmap : <https://www.aidsmap.com>

An HIV-positive person with an undetectable viral load, thanks to the treatment, no longer transmits HIV.

To find a testing site, an HIV Reference Centre, or to receive more information on treatment, visit

WWW.PREVENTIONSIDA.ORG



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PLATE-FORME PRÉVENTION SIDA

The brochure was developed with the collaboration of healthcare professionals and the review of doctors and nurses from the Erasmus and St-Luc HRCs.
With the support of ViiV Healthcare Belgium.

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