



Language Matters

Undetectable = Untransmittable or “U=U” is a concept and phrase created by community members and researchers to convey information about the risk of HIV transmission. As healthcare providers, we can use the U=U platform to provide assurance to people living with HIV about their individual health and the health of their sexual partners. By being definitive in our language, we demonstrate our belief in the science. Table 1 provides suggested language to utilize when discussing the risk of HIV transmission and U=U.

Table 1 Suggested language for HIV transmission risk

Replace these Terms or Statements...	...With these Preferred Ones
Greatly reduces, extremely unlikely	Can't pass it on, can't transmit
Virtually impossible, almost no risk, close to zero	No risk, zero risk
Helps to prevent	Prevents HIV
Makes it hard to transmit	Eliminates onward transmission
You never know...	We know

Using person-first language is key to decreasing stigma and meeting people where they are at. This means addressing and acknowledging people as individuals first and foremost, rather than focusing on their diagnosis or behaviors. It also means using words to describe a person's circumstances in a way that is mindful and non-judgemental. Table 2 provides examples of person-first language when addressing concepts such as HIV, STDs, substance use, and people with criminal justice involvement.

Table 2 Suggested person-first language

Replace these Terms...	...With these Preferred Ones
HIV patient, AIDS patient	Person/people living with HIV
AIDS or HIV carrier	
HIV infected	
Infected with HIV	Diagnosed with HIV, acquired HIV
Full-blown AIDS	AIDS, an AIDS diagnosis
AIDS test	HIV test

Table 2 Suggested person-first language

Replace these Terms...	...With these Preferred Ones
Noncompliant, unmotivated, resistant	Not adherent to medication, facing challenges with adherence, opted not to, has not begun treatment
Unprotected sex	Condomless sex with or without PrEP, sex not protected by condoms or antiretroviral prevention methods
Prostitute or prostitution	Sex-worker, sale of sexual services, transactional sex
Promiscuous	Having multiple partners
Clean	Currently abstaining from drug use, making changes to drug use Do NOT use when referring to negative HIV or STD status
Dirty	Engaging in drug use/risky/high risk behavior
Drug abuser, addict, junkie, drug user, substance abuser, dope fiend	Person who uses (or injects) drugs, person with a substance use disorder, person living with a substance use disorder
Drug abuse, substance abuse, alcohol abuse	Substance use or misuse
Offender, ex-offender, felon, former felon, ex-criminal, convict, ex-convict, inmate, delinquent, prisoner	Person with a history of criminal justice involvement, person who is/was incarcerated
Homeless person	Person experiencing homelessness