



POSITION STATEMENT ON UNDETECTABLE EQUALS UNTRANSMITTABLE (U=U)

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In congruence with science and robust evidence the Canadian Association of Nurses in HIV/AIDS Care (CANAC) endorses the ‘Undetectable equals Untransmittable’ (U=U) position. U=U affirms that people living with HIV (PLWH) who maintain an undetectable viral load cannot transmit HIV through sexual activities.

Background:

In the 90-90-90 targets set by the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS and endorsed by the Government of Canada, effective treatment for HIV is an essential component of any HIV strategy.¹ With effective and available antiretroviral therapy (ART), PLWH can live long and fulfilling lives.² End-goals of HIV treatment are ultimately HIV viral suppression, an increased health status and quality of life for a PLWH and the prevention of further HIV infections.³

Since 2008, there has been increasing evidence supporting that PLWH on effective ART may not transmit HIV to their partners.^{4, 5} Once a PLWH is continuously taking ART and has achieved and maintained viral suppression (i.e., tests cannot detect HIV-1 RNA) for six months, they are considered to have a negligible to non-existent risk of transmission during sexual activities, pregnancy, and delivery.^{6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 11, 12, 13} After viral suppression is achieved, viral load and CD4 testing should continue at regular intervals.¹⁰ When viral suppression is achieved, a PLWH is at a *greatly reduced* chance of transmitting HIV through both breastfeeding and sharing injection drug equipment; however, there is not enough evidence, yet, to conclude that there is no risk.^{7, 14}

Position:

Living with HIV is most often marked by significant health and social inequities, such as increased rates of morbidity, mortality, discrimination, and stigmatization.¹⁵ Congruent with the CNA’s Code of Ethics¹⁶, CANAC endorses the science and overwhelming evidence behind U=U as a step to reduce the stigma and discrimination faced by PLWH and promote their overall health and well-being. In line with our mission, CANAC encourages research and evidence-based HIV/AIDS nursing practice, which includes the incorporation of the U=U position into our members’ diverse clinical, research, and educational practices in the pursuit of fostering excellence in HIV/AIDS nursing.

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