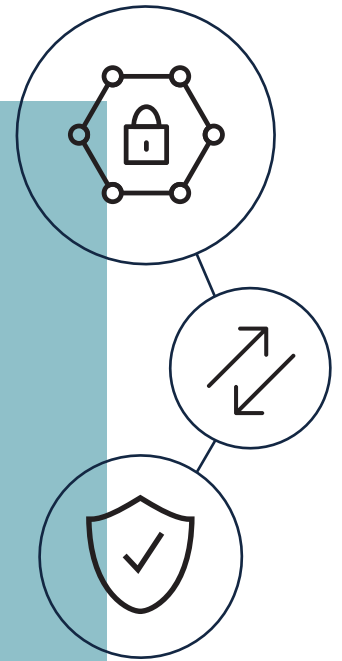


4

How confident are you that HIV treatment is prevention?



We always knew that treatment reduced the chance of passing on HIV, but proving that it eliminated the risk took some time.

Over the last few years, hundreds of international health organisations have come out in agreement that sexual HIV transmission cannot occur when people with HIV are on treatment and our viral load is undetectable.

There were rumblings early in the 2000s, including from a Spanish cohort who reported that of the seroconversions that occurred among 400 heterosexual sero-different couples between 1991 and 2003, not one had taken place when the positive partner was on treatment.

The 2008 Swiss Statement was the first to pronounce that HIV treatment stopped transmission; providing the positive person was adherent, had an undetectable viral load and no sexually transmitted infections (STIs). But there were still caveats of concern. Would having

an STI affect viral load? Did the viral levels in blood always correlate to those in semen and vaginal fluids? What about viral blips?

In 2011, HPTN 052 reported on 1700 sero-different couples, half of whom were started on treatment, the other half not. Of the 28 seroconversions that happened, only one occurred among the treating group and that occurred very early on in the trial when viral load was likely still high. But it was a largely heterosexual group so we needed more evidence.

That's when the PARTNER study reported its findings. This study had enrolled serodifferent couples where the HIV positive partner was on treatment and where couples were already not always using condoms (often for many years). And importantly, one-third of the almost 900 couples were gay men.

PARTNER finally provided reassurance for our concerns about viral load blips. Also, no transmissions were seen in the 91 couples where the positive partner reported an STI (approximately one-third of gay couples had open relationships). **The final results, presented and published in July 2016, reported**

zero transmissions after **58,000** times without condoms

Finally, at the IAS conference held in Paris in 2017, results from the **Opposites Attract** study of 358 gay male couples also reported

zero 
linked transmissions
after almost
17,000
times when condoms
were not used

So, rest-assured, treatment as prevention (TasP) really does work. Combine this with the unequivocal findings that timely treatment is best for our long-term health, and it's a no brainer.

Today, coupled with much safer treatment options, we have a clear sense that immediate and constant treatment is best for both for our own health and for the safety of our partners.

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