

UNDETECTABLE
= UNTRANSMITTABLE

U = U



INTRODUCTION

The U=U campaign, which stands for “Undetectable = Untransmittable,” is a public health initiative that aims to raise awareness about the scientific evidence showing that people living with HIV who achieve and maintain an undetectable viral load through consistent antiretroviral therapy (ART) cannot sexually transmit the virus to their HIV-negative partners.

The campaign is based on extensive research, including studies like HPTN 052, PARTNER, and Opposites Attract, which demonstrated that when a person with HIV has an undetectable viral load, the risk of transmitting the virus to sexual partners is zero. This groundbreaking message helps reduce stigma, encourages testing and treatment, and empowers those living with HIV to take control of their health.

U=U is transforming perceptions of HIV by promoting a message of hope and reassurance. It helps people understand that effective treatment not only improves the health and longevity of individuals with HIV but also serves as a powerful prevention strategy. By spreading awareness about U=U, the campaign fosters a more supportive and informed community, reduces HIV-related stigma and discrimination, and motivates people to stay engaged in care and adhere to their treatment. This campaign is vital in the global effort to end the HIV epidemic.



SAKHILE XABA

My name is Sakhile Xaba, and I live in Mnambithi in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). I was diagnosed with HIV in 2003. What motivates me to stay on treatment is my deep desire and dream to see my children grow up, complete their education, go to university, find jobs, and eventually get married and start their own families.

U=U encourages people to get tested for HIV. If they test positive, they should start taking their medication right away to lead a better life. The concept of U=U has been very beneficial for me. I think of my immune system as strong and protective “soldiers” that keep the virus suppressed, preventing it from reproducing. This makes me healthy and confident that I won’t transmit HIV to my partner.

For men living with HIV, it’s crucial to accept their status and take their medication properly every day. This helps keep the virus suppressed and prevents it from replicating.

It is important for everyone living with HIV to know their viral load—the amount of virus in their blood. Monitoring helps us understand if the virus is undetectable, which is essential for our health. Keeping the virus “stressed” and unable to replicate is key to living a healthy life.

My message to other men living with HIV is simple: take care of yourself by taking your medications correctly and consistently. This will help you live a long life and protect you from opportunistic infections. By keeping the virus undetectable, you also prevent its transmission to sexual partners.



MEISIE MOTAUNG

I was diagnosed with HIV in 2004 and have been living with the virus for almost 20 years. Throughout my life living with HIV, I decided to grow my dreadlocks, which hadn't grown before. I call them my "dreadlocks of hope."

My mother and younger sister have always been by my side, serving as pillars of strength. During that period, I was physically unwell, and there was a lot of stigma surrounding HIV. I even contemplated suicide. One of my favorite quotes is, "From pain to peace, from mockery to victory." It reminds me that life is unpredictable, so it's better to choose peace and victory over despair.

I appreciate the concept of being undetectable through adherence to treatment. When people living with HIV maintain an undetectable viral load, the risk of transmitting HIV sexually is zero.

I practice what I preach by adhering to my treatment regimen and maintaining an undetectable status. Initially, I disliked the side effects of my medication, but after discussing it with my clinic, they changed my treatment, and I've never looked back.

Monitoring your viral load is crucial if you aim to be undetectable. Understanding the importance of viral load monitoring allows me to take charge of my health. I also stay away from stress, drink plenty of water, and maintain an active lifestyle.

The government has given us the tools and opportunity to live healthy lives; we just need to meet them halfway by taking our treatment. Today, I live a full life as an LGBTQ+ ambassador, radio personality, and sports announcer. I truly believe that U=U (Undetectable = Untransmittable) is a lifesaver.

LIFE SAVER



U = U

KHOLOFELO BOLEDI

I am Kholofelo from Limpopo, and I was diagnosed with HIV in 2008. I am currently 38 years old.

My four kids are my main motivation to prioritize my health so I can be a healthy mom for them. I am also blessed with a supportive boyfriend who is HIV-negative. My children and my positive outlook on life have been key factors in keeping me committed to my treatment.

Being undetectable and untransmittable has allowed me to have my kids and live a healthy life with them. As a sexually active woman, I believe in using protection or abstaining to stay safe. By taking my medication at the same time every day, I maintain an undetectable status, ensuring that I cannot transmit the virus to my sexual partner.

I put myself first to some extent because I know

that if I'm healthy, my family will be too. I invest a lot in self-love, including my passion for exercise, which is an important part of my "me time."

I disclosed my status to my family to gain their support and connected with others living with HIV. I often take my kids to the clinic for checkups, especially to encourage mothers who are still struggling to accept their condition.

I educated myself about HIV and treatment options, empowering myself to monitor my viral load. I consider myself fortunate to have a condition that is controllable with the right knowledge and care.

I deeply appreciate my medication. Sometimes, I even find myself thanking my pills for being there for me, as they have been instrumental in allowing me to live a full, healthy life.

HEALTH FIRST

A young man with short dark hair, wearing a dark blue polo shirt and a black wristwatch, is smiling and resting his chin on his right hand. He is looking towards the camera. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

U = U

TSHEPANG

PHIRI

My name is Tshepang Phiri from Soshanguve Ext. I am 19 years old and was born with HIV. I started taking antiretroviral therapy (ART) from a young age to prevent opportunistic infections related to the virus. Growing up, I have been consistent with my medication, and now I see myself as a victor over HIV.

Every year, I go for viral load testing, which shows that the virus is undetectable in my body. This means the medication is working effectively, and I cannot transmit the virus to my sexual partner. This is an important reminder that with proper treatment, living with HIV is not the end of the world.

My advice to young people is to adhere to their treatment and never skip their medication.

It is crucial to take your pills properly and not miss any doses, so you can live a healthy life just like mine. If the virus remains undetectable, it does not have the strength to be transmitted to sexual partners. Remember, undetectable equals untransmittable (U=U).

Living with HIV has taught me that with the right support and medication, you can lead a normal, healthy life. Stay strong, stay adherent, and keep fighting!

VICTORY

NOKUZOLA MALESA

My name is Nokuzola Malesa, and I am 23 years old. In 2022, I found out that I have HIV. Fortunately, my sister works in the HIV/AIDS field, so I had access to valuable information that helped me on my journey. I knew from the start that having HIV was not the end of the world.

My sister has been a tremendous support, especially as I struggled with internal stigma. She encouraged me to attend various programs, and now I volunteer in some of them. Having a knowledgeable and understanding person living with me has motivated me to stay on treatment and maintain a positive outlook.

Understanding the concept of Undetectable equals Untransmittable (U=U) has empowered me. It means that by keeping my viral load undetectable, I cannot transmit the virus to my sexual partner. This has encouraged me to be diligent in taking my treatment while also being kind to myself.

Information is crucial. Before understanding U=U, I didn't ask questions about my viral load. Now, I ensure that I ask the right questions whenever my blood is drawn at the clinic. The staff are supportive and understanding.

Living with HIV is manageable, and one can live a fulfilling life. By setting aside negative thoughts and speaking to myself differently, I realized it is not the end of my life.

LONG LIFE





DUKASHE FAMILY

The Dukashe Family lives in an HIV mixed-status relationship with resilience, love, and hope.

The wife was diagnosed with HIV in 2002, while her husband is HIV-negative. She explains, "Starting treatment was difficult due to the number of pills and their side effects. Despite these challenges, my motivation to stay on treatment is driven by my desire to live a healthy life and protect my husband."

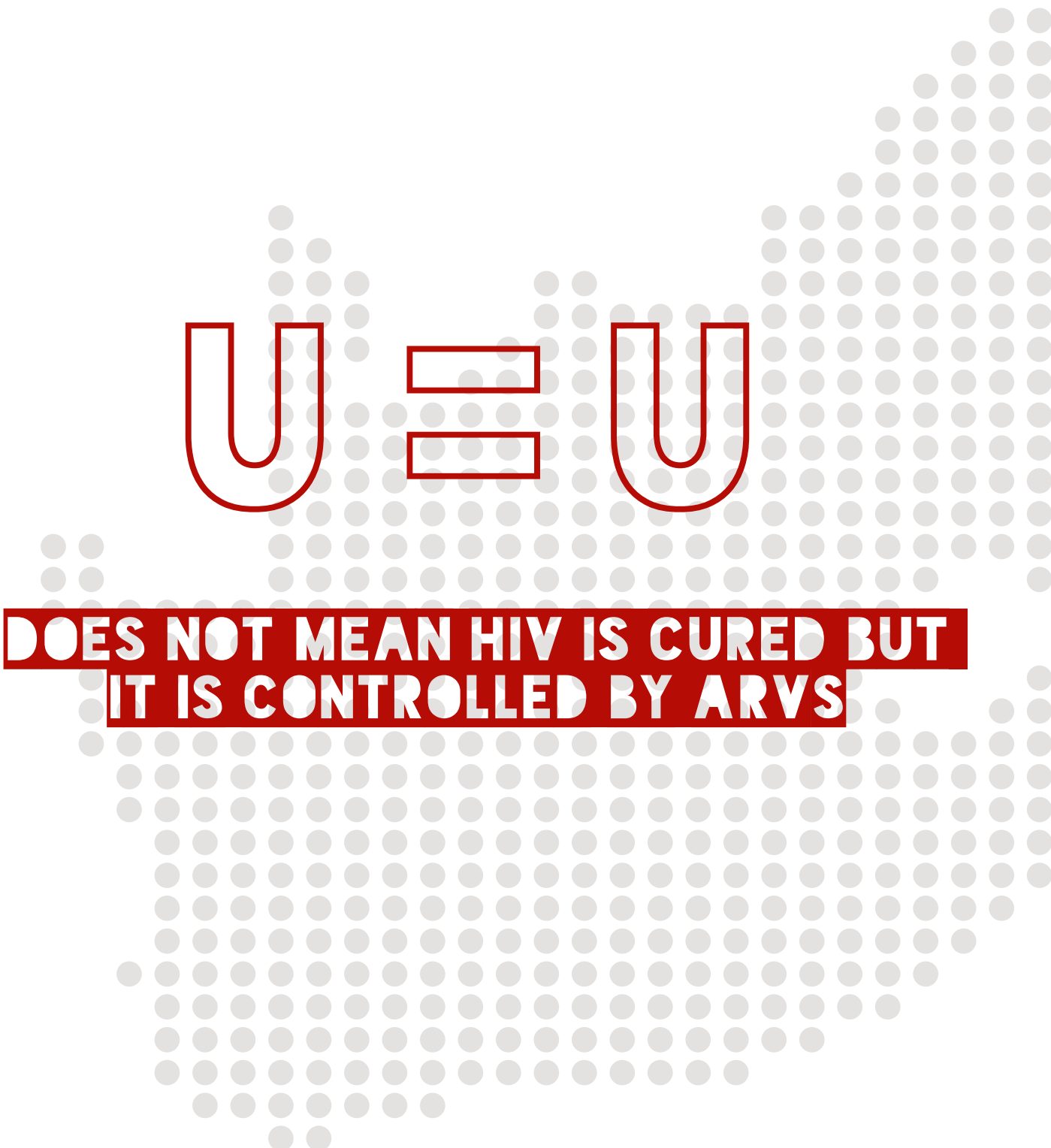
The husband adds, "We met in 2003 and married in 2006. Initially, due to our mixed HIV status, we spent a significant amount on intrauterine insemination in 2009, thinking it was the only safe way to have a child. In 2013, we discovered the HPTN 052 study, which showed that people living with HIV cannot transmit the virus to their partners if they are on effective treatment and have an undetectable viral load. This discovery gave us hope, and we decided to conceive naturally in 2014. It worked, and now we have two beautiful, HIV-negative daughters."

The wife continues, "I maintained my treatment, kept an undetectable viral load, and chose formula feeding to further reduce the transmission risk. This was a personal choice; women with HIV can breastfeed exclusively for six months. Babies also receive medicine for additional protection from contracting HIV. (Pregnant women with HIV should seek more information from their clinic)."

She also notes, "U=U (Undetectable = Untransmittable) has strengthened our marriage and safeguarded my sexual and reproductive health rights."

The Dukashe family encourages couples in mixed-status relationships to disclose their HIV status. They emphasize that it is crucial for the HIV-negative partner to be supportive, ensuring the positive partner adheres to treatment and regularly checks their viral load. Regular viral load testing is essential to confirm that antiretroviral drugs are effective.

To other mixed-status couples, they say: "**Love your HIV-positive partners. They are just like anyone else.** It is safer to be with someone who is open about their status and on treatment than with someone whose HIV status is unknown."



U = U

**DOES NOT MEAN HIV IS CURED BUT
IT IS CONTROLLED BY ARVS**

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A **MESSAGE** OF **HOPE**



333 Grosvenor Street
Hatfield
Pretoria
0083

info@sanac.org.za
+27 12 748 1000