

HIV LANGUAGE Guide

HIV is a long term, manageable medical condition like many others but some of the words used about HIV, and people living with HIV, can have stigmatising connotations.

Language is powerful and can affect the way we view or treat people and how people view themselves.

This guide offers alternatives to some commonly used words and phrases about HIV.

X TRY TO AVOID

✓ BETTER TO USE

X HIV positive person

✓ Person living with HIV
Put the person before the diagnosis

X Person infected with HIV

✓ Person living with HIV
Avoid use of the words 'infected' or 'infection'

X HIV virus

✓ HIV
Human Immunodeficiency Virus

X Became infected with HIV

✓ Contracted or acquired HIV
Avoid use of the word 'infected'

X Catch / caught HIV

✓ Acquire / acquired HIV

X HIV / AIDS

✓ Use either HIV or AIDS
HIV and AIDS are not the same thing. HIV is a virus, AIDS is a clinical syndrome

X AIDS

Essentially a historical term standing for 'Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome' – meaning a collection of illnesses which might occur as a result of a severely weakened immune system. As more and more people have access to effective HIV medication which keeps the immune system strong, the term is not now in regular use. Some clinicians may use the term 'advanced HIV' in situations where someone has not benefitted from anti-retroviral medication

X AIDS test

✓ HIV test
AIDS is a clinical syndrome and therefore there is no 'test' for it

X Victim / sufferer

✓ Person living with HIV
Words like 'victim' or 'sufferer' can have extremely negative connotations

X Disclose / disclosure

✓ Tell, talk about, share
The word 'disclose' has negative and secretive connotations which can magnify feelings of shame and self-stigma

X Clean - as in 'are you clean?'

✓ Do you know your HIV status?
Using the word 'clean' can be highly offensive and implies that people living with HIV are 'dirty'

X Comply / compliant with HIV medication

✓ Adhere / adherence to HIV medication
'Comply' implies following instructions. 'Adhere' recognises active engagement in care

X Serodiscordant couple

✓ Mixed status couple
A relationship where one person is living with HIV and the other is not

X Mother to baby transmission of HIV

✓ 'Vertical' or 'perinatal' transmission of HIV
'Mother to baby' implies blame

X Eradicating HIV by 2030

✓ Ending all new transmissions of HIV by 2030
The word 'eradicating' is aggressive and stigmatising

X Ending HIV

✓ Ending new transmissions of HIV
There will be many people still living with HIV when there are no new transmissions

X Number of HIV infections

✓ Number of HIV acquisitions or number of people diagnosed with HIV

X Zero new infections

✓ Zero new transmissions of HIV
Avoid using the word 'infection'