

Having an undetectable viral load doesn't mean you are cured.



You still have HIV and need to stay on treatment to keep your viral load suppressed.

Why is it good to have an undetectable viral load?

Having an undetectable viral load is important for a number of reasons.

- First of all, because your immune system is able to recover and become stronger, it means that you have a very low risk of becoming ill because of HIV. It also reduces your risk of developing opportunistic infections.
- Secondly, having an undetectable viral load means that the risk of HIV becoming resistant to the anti-HIV drugs you are taking is very small.
- Finally, having an undetectable viral load reduces the risk of passing on HIV to someone else.

What must I do if I am not virologically suppressed?

A detectable or unsuppressed viral load is a viral load greater than 1000copies/ml. The most common causes for a detectable viral load are insufficient levels of ARV drugs in your blood or that the virus does not respond any longer to the drugs you are taking. Your healthcare worker will determine why your viral load is not suppressed and advise you on what you need to do.

Please remember, it is very important that you take your medication at the same time every day and avoid traditional/herbal treatment that may interfere with these medications.

Failing to adhere to your treatment is the commonest cause of a detectable viral load

Steps to staying well on your ARVs:

1. KNOW your viral load. Write it down in your clinic card or book and try to remember the viral load result.
2. If your virus is suppressed, then you will remain in good health if you continue taking your treatment.
3. If you are not suppressed, talk to a nurse or healthcare worker caring for you. Get advice on adherence, and then RE-CHECK your viral load. If this new result is still above 1000 copies/mL and you are taking your ARVs carefully, you may need to have your ARV medication changed UNDER THE SUPERVISION OF YOUR HEALTHCARE PROVIDER.

Parting words

If you are taking ART, follow your HIV care provider's advice. Visit your HIV care provider regularly and always take your HIV medication as directed. This will give you the greatest chance of having an undetectable viral load. Taking other actions, like using a condom consistently and correctly, can lower your chances of transmitting HIV or contracting an STD even more. For more information, visit your nearest health facility.



www.



twitter :



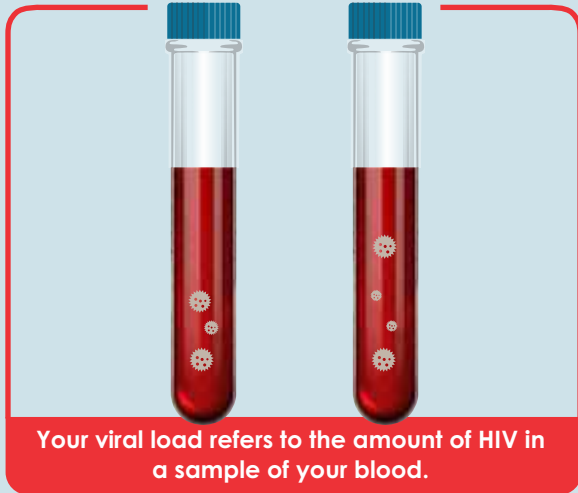
Patient Education Pamphlet on Viral Load Monitoring



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

Patient Education Pamphlet on Viral Load Monitoring

The purpose of this pamphlet is to provide information on viral load monitoring as a strategy of managing and monitoring clients on antiretroviral treatment. The pamphlet is earmarked for use by any group of patients and health workers.



What is a viral load?

The term “viral load” refers to the amount of HIV in a sample of your blood. When your viral load is high, you have more HIV in your body, and that means your immune system is not fighting HIV as well.

A viral load test is a laboratory test that measures the amount of viral particles in a millilitre or drop of blood. These particles are called “copies”.

Why is a viral load test important?

A viral load test helps provide information on your health status and provides information on how well your antiretroviral treatment is working to control the HIV virus.

A viral load test gives the best accurate and early indication on whether your treatment is working or not.

What happens if I do not have my viral load checked?

The healthcare worker will not know how good your health is whilst taking ARVs unless they can test the level of virus in the blood. A viral count will help your healthcare team to decide your best treatment options.

Taking ARVs which are not working for a long time can make your HIV more difficult to treat. Your healthcare team will decide your best treatment options based upon your viral count.

Goal of ART

The goal of ART is to move your viral load down, ideally to undetectable levels of less than 1000 copies/ml. For your antiretroviral medication to be effective it is very important for you to take your medication at the same time every day and avoid traditional/herbal treatment that may interfere with these medications.

In general, your viral load will be declared “undetectable” if it is under 1000 copies in a sample of your blood.

Having an “undetectable” viral load doesn't mean that the virus is completely gone from your body, just that it is below what a lab test can find. You still have HIV and need to stay on ART to remain healthy.

What is a normal viral load?

There is really no such thing as a “normal” viral load. People who are not infected with HIV (HIV negative people) have no viral load at all, so there's no “normal” range for reference. The aim of treatment is to have an “undetectable” viral load.



When and how often do I need a viral load test?

Your HIV care provider will order a viral load test after 6 and 12 months of starting ART. Afterwards your viral load will be done after every 12 months if there are no problems and your viral load remains “undetectable”.

Your health care provider might also order a viral load

test if you fall sick or continue to be unwell despite taking treatment as expected.

If your HIV viral load is not suppressed at any time:

- Continue taking your ARVs and talk to your counsellor or healthcare worker about any problem you may have with taking your medication.
- Re-check your viral load after 3 months and wait for your results and healthcare worker to advice.

What does an undetectable viral load mean?

If your viral load is less than 1000 copies/mL, everyone is happy. It means you are in good health and your HIV treatment is working.

An undetectable viral load is a viral load less than 1000copies/ml. Having an undetectable viral load does not mean you have been cured of HIV. You still have HIV and you need to stay on treatment to keep your viral load suppressed.

Even when your viral load is undetectable, HIV can still exist in semen, vaginal fluids, breast milk, and other parts of your body. For this reason, you should continue to take your medication.