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# Undetectable Equals Untransmittable: Building Hope and Ending HIV Stigma

Nothing Without Us: HIV and Social Justice  
Iris House 13th Annual Women as the Face of AIDS Summit  
May 7, 2018

*Together, we can change the course of the HIV epidemic...one woman at a time.*

#onewomanatatime

[www.thewellproject.org](http://www.thewellproject.org)

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# About The Well Project

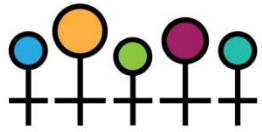
- Non-profit organization with a mission to change the course of the HIV/AIDS pandemic through a unique and comprehensive focus on women and girls
- Leverages technology to improve health outcomes and increase quality of life for women and girls living with HIV
- Provides accessible and comprehensive #information, #community support, and #advocacy building
- Access our resources and join our community at [www.thewellproject.org](http://www.thewellproject.org)



# About Prevention Access Campaign

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- A community of HIV advocates, activists, researchers, and organizations around the world uniting to clarify and disseminate the revolutionary but largely unknown fact that *people living with HIV on effective treatment do not sexually transmit HIV*.
  - Launched in early 2016 by a group of people living with HIV who created a [Consensus Statement](#) with global experts to clear up mixed messages about the science of U=U.
  - That Statement was the [genesis of the U=U movement](#) that is sharing the U=U message to dismantle HIV stigma, improve the lives of people living with HIV, bolster treatment advocacy efforts, and bring us closer to ending the epidemic.
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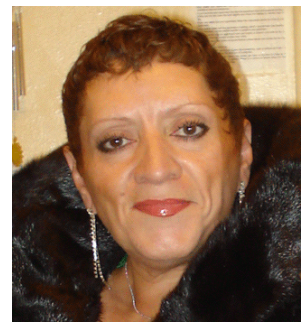


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# Speakers



**Nancy Duncan**, HIV Testing Counselor, Planned Parenthood, CFAR North Shore University Hospital



**Lilibeth Gonzalez**, HIV/AIDS Community Health Educator, GMHC

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**Michelle Lopez**, Campaign Coordinator for CDC HTW Campaign for New York, Peer Lead Consultant, ACRIA

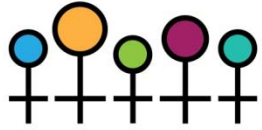


**Krista Martel**, executive director, The Well Project



**Bruce Richman, Ed.M, JD**, founder, executive director, Prevention Access Campaign and Undetectable = Untransmittable (U=U)

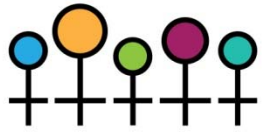
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# Agenda

- Introductions
- U=U Overview
  - Treatment as prevention
  - Research
  - U=U campaign
  - Why didn't I know about this?
  - Issues specific to women
- Panel Discussion of U=U
- Q&A



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# U=U Overview



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## What Is “U=U”?

When a person living with HIV is taking HIV drugs and their viral load has reached **undetectable** levels (not enough HIV in their bloodstream for a test to measure), that person **cannot transmit HIV to a partner who is HIV-negative**

HIV community members, advocates, and experts refer to this as **“Undetectable Equals Untransmittable” (“U=U”)**

[www.thewellproject.org](http://www.thewellproject.org)

**IT STARTS WITH ME.  
I WON'T PASS ON HIV.**

I know that someone doing well on HIV medication can't pass it on. If everybody does their bit we can stop HIV.

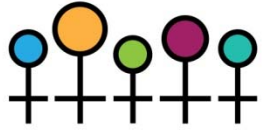
*Paída*

terrence higgins trust  
IT STARTS WITH ME

Get tested. Stay protected. Find out how at:  
[StartsWithMe.org.uk](http://StartsWithMe.org.uk)

Produced by Terrence Higgins Trust for HIV PREVENTION ENGLAND.  
Terrence Higgins Trust is a registered charity in England and Wales (reg. no. 238527) and in Scotland (SC039786). Company reg. no. 1776147.

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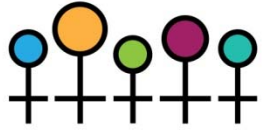
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# Treatment as Prevention (TasP)



- Foundation of U=U
- Refers to ways we can use HIV treatment regimen to ***lower the risk of spreading HIV***
- For people living with HIV (HIV+):
  - Taking HIV drugs can reduce viral load
  - Blood, vaginal fluids, and/or semen (cum) is much less likely to transmit HIV to others
  - Mixed-status couples (one partner HIV+, one HIV-) who want to have babies are more likely to safely conceive "the old-fashioned way"

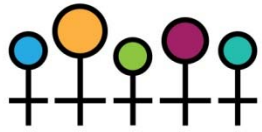




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# How HIV Treatment Makes U=U

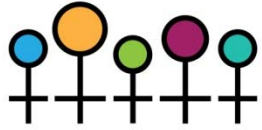
- Chance of passing on any virus has to do with **amount of virus** (viral load) in body fluids
- HIV drugs prevent virus from **reproducing** (making copies of itself)
- When an HIV treatment regimen works...
  - HIV is **unable** to reproduce
  - HIV will not infect new cells in your body
  - **Viral load is undetectable**, which means...
    - You will have a healthier immune system
    - **You cannot transmit HIV**



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# How HIV Treatment Makes U=U

- HIV drugs **cannot cure HIV**
  - Even when viral load is **undetectable**, there are still 'resting' or latent HIV cells in certain areas (**reservoirs**) of your body (e.g., GI tract (gut), brain, or bone marrow)
- ... but having an undetectable viral load means there is **no detectable trace of virus** in the blood
  - There may be in the genital tracts (e.g., semen, vaginal secretions)

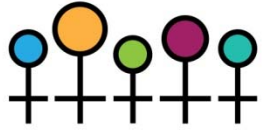


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# The Research Behind U=U

## *The "Swiss Consensus Statement" (2008)*

- Group of HIV care providers in Switzerland produced a paper aimed at other doctors in their country
- Agreed that an HIV+ person who had had an undetectable viral load for at least 6 months on HIV treatment had a **negligible risk** (so small or unimportant that it is not worth considering) of transmitting HIV
  - Based on new data and their clients' experiences

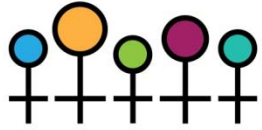


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# The Research Behind U=U

## ***HPTN 052 (2011 –interim /2015 - final)***

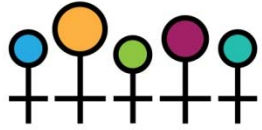
- Large study – more than 1,500 mostly heterosexual, mixed-status couples
- Randomly divided into an early treatment and late treatment group
- ***No cases of transmission when the HIV+ partner had an undetectable viral load***



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# The Research Behind U=U

- HPTN 052 ***changed HIV prevention***
  - Put an additional tool – treatment for people living with HIV – in prevention toolbox
- However, ***information not well known or understood*** outside of HIV advocate and expert circles
  - Mainstream media accounts of this news was often confusing, misleading, loaded with HIV stigma
- Many ***people living with HIV were not aware*** of this exciting development



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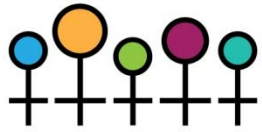
# The Research Behind U=U

## ***PARTNER (2016)***

- Looked at HIV transmission risk in heterosexual and gay mixed-status couples
  - Partners living with HIV on HIV treatment with undetectable viral loads
- After 58,000 instances of sex, among 900 couples who were not using condoms, ***zero cases of HIV acquisition***
- Results of PARTNER and follow-up results of HPTN 052 published in mid-2016
  - Still confusion, misinformation, silence around topic

[www.thewellproject.org](http://www.thewellproject.org)

[www.preventionaccess.org](http://www.preventionaccess.org)



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# The U=U Campaign

## #UequalsU

- Launched by health equity program **Prevention Access Campaign (PAC)** in early 2016
- A project **led by people living with HIV**
- Unites global community of HIV advocates, activists, researchers, community partners
- Mission is to clarify and share the fact that ***people living with HIV who are HIV treatment with an undetectable viral load cannot transmit HIV when they have sex***



If your viral load is undetectable, it means you can't pass HIV to others. Treatment = Prevention! [on.nyc.gov/staysure](https://on.nyc.gov/staysure) #PlaySure #TasP



[www.thewellproject.org](http://www.thewellproject.org)



[www.preventionaccess.org](http://www.preventionaccess.org)

**U=U**  
**#LOVE POSITIVE**  
 exaequo.be  
 AIDES

**YOU are the solution**  
 Taking HIV medication daily suppresses the virus and means you can't pass it to others.  
**#UequalsU**  
 DCTakesonHIV.com

**U=U**  
 ACT UP DUBLIN  
**SCIENCE=HEALTH**  
 #UequalsU  
 #ScienceNotStigma

**CAN'T PASS IT ON**  
 14 European countries  
 888 couples  
 58,000 sets of sex without condoms  
**ZERO** HIV transmissions  
 We're living proof that HIV doesn't have to stop you from living. I'm healthy and I can't pass HIV on to my partner. Forever with HIV status: **POSITIVE**

**U=U**  
**UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE**  
**FACT.**  
**CAN'T PASS IT ON**

**U=U**  
**UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE**

**U=U**  
**UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE**  
 A PERSON LIVING WITH HIV WHO HAS AN UNDETECTABLE VIRAL LOAD DOES NOT TRANSMIT THE VIRUS TO THEIR PARTNERS.

**nam aidsmap**  
 HIV & AIDS - sharing knowledge, changing lives  
 "The scientific evidence is clear: Someone whose HIV is undetectable does not pose an infection risk to their sexual partners."  
 For information on HIV you can rely on: [www.aidsmap.com](http://www.aidsmap.com)  
**#UequalsU**

**It's a fact U=U**  
 Undetectable equals untransmittable  
 British HIV Association  
 prevention access campaign  
 The British HIV Association is proud to support the **U=U** consensus statement of the Prevention Access Campaign

**U=U**  
**UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE**  
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**UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE**  
**НЕДЕТЕКТАБІЛНО = НЕПРЕНΟΣЛІВО**

**Podporujen**  
**U=U**  
**UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE**  
**НЕДЕТЕКТАБІЛНО = НЕПРЕНΟΣЛІВО**

**NIET DETECTEERBAAR BETEKENT NIET OVERDRAAGBAAR**  
**n=n**  
**UNINFECTIOUS**  
**UNDETECTABLE**  
 تكوين في التربية العلاجية

**INDETECTABLE SIGNIFICA INTRANSMISIBILE**  
**U=U**  
**UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE**

**HIV BELIRLENEMİYORSA BULAŞTIRILMAZ. MI?**  
**U=U**  
**UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE**

**U=U**  
 Undetectable = Untransmittable non rilevabile = non trasmissibile  
**#UequalsU**  
 My viral load is undetectable that means I can't "sexually" pass it on to my "FRIENDS"

**San Francisco AIDS Foundation support**  
**U=U**  
 Undetectable=Untransmittable!  
**#UequalsU**  
 The science is clear: People living with HIV, who are on effective treatment, do not transmit HIV to sexual partners.

**بالعلاج VIH لا ينتشر**  
**مايتراش = مايتعداش**  
**K=K**  
**KHÔNG PHÁT HIỆN = KHÔNG LÂY TRUYỀN**

**IT'S A FACT: Undetectable = Untransmittable**  
 Planned Parenthood  
 People living with HIV, who are taking effective treatment, cannot pass HIV through sex.

**Undetectable equals untransmittable**  
 Taiwan Louden Association  
 Taiwan Louden Association is proud to support the **U=U** consensus statement of the Prevention Access Campaign  
 臺灣協會非常榮幸地成為全球達案U=U共識的成員之一 (Undetectable = Untransmittable · 測不到 = 不具備感染力)

**UNDETECTABLES**  
**U=U**  
**UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE!**  
 HOW DO YOU BECOME UNDETECTABLE?  
 You don't need to be a superhero to do something wonderful for yourself and your community. Taking the right medicine, you can lower the amount of virus in your body until it becomes undetectable. A low viral load is a good thing!

**nycHealthy @nycHealthy**  
 If your viral load is undetectable, it means you can't pass HIV to others. Treatment = Prevention! [nyc.gov/staysure](http://nyc.gov/staysure) #PlaySure #HasP

**NOW I KNOW**  
**U=U**  
**UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE**  
 I teach science and I spread love not stigma  
 William Matovu An HIV Activist  
 Love Ya Love organization  
[www.lovetolive.org](http://www.lovetolive.org)

**U=U**  
**UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE**  
**UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE**  
**UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE**

**K=K**  
**KHÔNG PHÁT HIỆN = KHÔNG LÂY TRUYỀN**

**U=U**  
**UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE**  
**驗唔到 = 傳唔到**  
**U=U**  
**UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE!**  
**Indetectable = Intransmissible**  
**#AmorPositivo #Undetectable=Intransmissible #UequalsU**

**U=U**  
**UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE!**  
**Indetectable = Intransmissible**  
**#AmorPositivo #Undetectable=Intransmissible #UequalsU**

**#U EQUALS U**  
**U=U**  
**UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE**  
**PRIDE YOUTH**  
 LIVING WITH HIV? Taking HIV medication daily suppresses the virus and means you can't pass HIV on to your partner. Treatment = Prevention! [nyc.gov/staysure](http://nyc.gov/staysure) #PlaySure #HasP

**HAGAMOS LAS CUENTAS**  
 Una persona VIH con carga viral undetectable es igual a Intransmissible  
**#undetectable**  
**U=U**  
**UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE**  
**UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE**  
**UNDETECTABLE = UNTRANSMITTABLE**

**9 in 10**  
 on treatment in achieved viral s  
 This means the virus is not detectable and cannot be transmitted

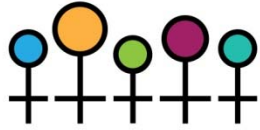




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# Community and Medical Experts Agree

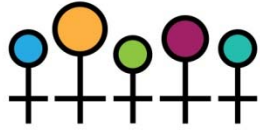
- 2016: U=U campaign released first-ever **global consensus statement** confirming science behind U=U
- >600 HIV experts, advocacy groups, service organizations, departments of health from 76 countries have endorsed U=U message
- Statement translated into 15 languages (so far)
  - The Well Project proudly endorsed consensus statement in April 2017
- Partners share info in ways that work for their communities
- Part of a strategy to break down HIV **stigma**; provide **hope**; **improve** lives of people living with HIV; advocate for **access**; move closer to ending HIV as a worldwide epidemic



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# Why Didn't I Know About This?

- Shifts in attitudes, beliefs, behaviors take time
  - For decades, condom use held up as only sure way to stop spread of HIV
  - Condom use often encouraged through campaigns and activities based in fear of contact with HIV
  - U=U as an HIV prevention strategy has been a difficult message for many to accept
  - STIs and unwanted pregnancies remain important issues
    - Condoms prevent these; HIV treatment as prevention does not



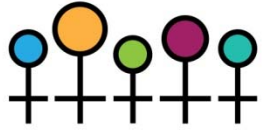
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# Why Didn't I Know About This?

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**Intersectional** forms of stigma affect whether U=U message is delivered

- People living with or vulnerable to HIV are often the same people whose sexuality carries stigma and judgment
  - E.g., transgender people, women of color, older women, young women, people living in poverty
  - Freedom to enjoy their sexual lives is often limited, not celebrated
  - Recognizing U=U helps alleviate stigma and judgment
- Recent study found that almost 40% of HIV+ women in the U.S. (as opposed to close to 90% in the UK) studied had not been told about U=U by providers
- In another study, participants vastly overestimated their own transmission risk



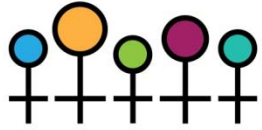
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# Important U=U Issues for Women

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## Relationship Power Dynamics

- Part of how HIV epidemic continues to flourish among women globally
  - Women often cannot demand that their partners use condoms due to uneven power dynamics, fear of violence
  - May follow that women are unable to ask about their partners' treatment status or viral load
    - Partners may not honor a woman's request to use condoms or other barriers based on their undetectable viral load
- ***More research and insight is needed*** into ways U=U may be affected by partner power dynamics for women

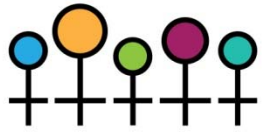


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# Important U=U Issues for Women

## Breastfeeding

- While HIV treatment can decrease HIV transmission through breast milk, there may still be some risk
  - Having undetectable viral load in blood may not guarantee undetectable viral load in breast milk
  - Other factors that affect HIV transmission through breastfeeding
    - E.g., **mastitis** (breast infection that can occur in breastfeeding mothers) can increase viral load before a woman knows she has it
  - In places without refrigeration or safe water, the risk from formula feeding with unsafe water – and the immune benefits of breastfeeding – may outweigh HIV risk



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# Important U=U Issues for Women

## Breastfeeding

- In high-resource areas with safe water, breastfeeding isn't recommended for women living with HIV
  - Experts on HIV and women's health divided as to whether or not this should be the case in U=U era
- Some providers suggest:
  - That women be given all information to make their own choice
  - Be supported to continue taking their HIV treatment
  - Be counseled on reducing potential harms of breastfeeding if they choose to do so

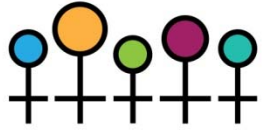


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# Important U=U Issues for Women

## HIV Criminalization

- As of April 2016, 72 countries and >30 U.S. states had laws making it a crime for a person living with HIV to do things (e.g., consensual sex) that are not crimes for HIV-people
- These laws build HIV stigma and discrimination into the legal system
- Do not take into account the realities of living with HIV in the era of U=U
  - U=U does not yet change status of existing laws



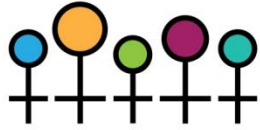
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# Important U=U Issues for Women

## HIV Criminalization

- In opposing these laws, it is important not to stigmatize or criminalize those that have detectable viral loads
- Women, especially, may have a harder time getting their viral loads to undetectable, for reasons including:
  - Being more likely to be diagnosed later in life than men
  - Prioritizing the health of others over their own
  - Higher rates of violence, poverty, instability that come with these social determinants of health that make it hard to be consistent with medication
- ***Criminalizing people based on HIV status is never appropriate, regardless of viral load***

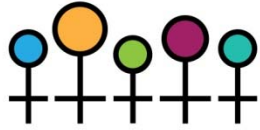




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# The Bottom Line

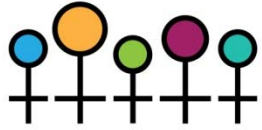
- Increasing awareness that having an undetectable viral load means that people living with HIV will not transmit the virus can have a ***dramatic impact on public and personal perceptions of HIV***
- HIV stigma = biggest barrier to ending HIV epidemic
- Important to break down stigma wherever possible by providing access to information, community support, advocacy -- all of which build **hope**
- U=U has the potential to address all kinds of HIV stigma



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## The Bottom Line

- While researchers must continue to examine promise and impact of treatment as prevention, ***the science that is currently available strongly supports U=U***
- We need to make sure that ***all people living with HIV, or vulnerable to becoming HIV+, have access to this life-altering information***, so that they can make informed decisions about their own sexual health and lives



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# Panel Discussion

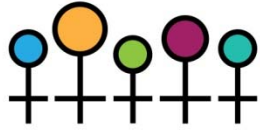
*Nancy Duncan, Lilibeth Gonzalez,  
and Michelle Lopez*



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## Learn More!

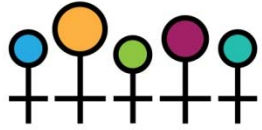
- To learn more about this topic, and for links to articles featuring more details, please read the full fact sheet on this topic:
  - [Undetectable Equals Untransmittable: Building Hope and Ending HIV](#)
  - [Indetectable es igual a intransmisible: infundir esperanza y eliminar el estigma](#)
- Visit [Prevention Access Campaign](#) **#UequalsU**
  - [@preventionAC](#)
- For more fact sheets and to connect to our community of women living with HIV, visit:
  - [www.thewellproject.org](http://www.thewellproject.org)
  - [www.facebook.com/thewellproject](https://www.facebook.com/thewellproject)
  - [www.twitter.com/thewellproject](https://www.twitter.com/thewellproject)



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# Additional Resources

- [U=U: Undetectable = Untransmittable](#) (Video)  
– *from Prevention Access Campaign*
- [If I Am Undetectable I Can't Transmit the HIV Virus](#) (Video Blog)  
– *by Maria T. Mejia*
- [HIV Undetectable = Untransmittable: Interview With Bruce Richman](#)  
– *by Nelson Vergel, from Program for Wellness Restoration*
- [Infant Feeding Basics: For Women Living with HIV in the US](#) (PDF)  
– *from HIVE*
- [If We Act to Remove Structural, Behavioral and Social Barriers, We Can End the HIV Epidemic With the Medicines We Already Have: A Conversation With Dr. Ben Young](#)  
– *by Olivia G. Ford, from TheBodyPRO.com*
- [Why, for HIV, Undetectable = Untransmittable](#)  
– *by Roger Pebody, from TheBody.com*



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# Thank You!



## Questions & Answers

The Q & A will come from the questions submitted to the presenters through the chat box during the webinar session.