



U = U Is Real, It Matters, and We Still Don't Talk About It Enough

Science evolves—and so does hope. U=U proves people with HIV on treatment can't transmit it. It's not myth, it's medicine—100% true. Tom Duane shares his thoughts on the importance of the U=U (Undetectable = Untransmittable) message, and the need to share it far and wide.

July 3, 2025 By [Tom Duane](#)

I was watching a nature documentary the other night. The baritone voiceover informed me that at one time, the entire scientific community agreed that there was no homosexuality among animals in nature. 100%! No doubt!

Of course, we know that not to be true now. Homosexuality is found in 1,500 species in the animal kingdom, including birds, beasts, and everything in between. This is one reason why the scientific community is so wary of claiming anything is 100%: science can always get smarter.

When the U=U, Undetectable = Untransmittable message was first being shared and I heard that the medical community around the world was saying that there was zero risk with 100% surety, I was skeptical. Zero risk? A person living with HIV on successful treatment with an undetectable viral load, like me, can't transmit the virus sexually, and it's 100% scientifically bona fide? It sounded too good to be true.

Then I read about the decades of studies with thousands of serodiscordant couple participants, performing thousands upon thousands of condomless sex acts with zero transmission, and I was sold. (Thousands of condomless sex acts? The mind reels!)

I've spent decades fighting for people with HIV and AIDS to get the treatment and the dignity they deserve. There's been a lot of progress, but I am sometimes shocked at a very positive change that still doesn't get the fanfare it should: and that is the message of U = U. Around the world, over 1,100 community partners from 106 countries have signed on with the Prevention Access Campaign to promote U=U, but so many in the United States have never heard of it. U=U is something I go out of my way to remind people of, to teach people about, in all sorts of settings where sex and desire and safety are discussed.

It's truly surprising, because the first U = U campaign was launched in 2016—nearly a decade ago! For nearly a decade, we've had clear evidence that U = U is good science, good health advice, and good news for people living with HIV and AIDS, and all those who love and care about them.

There's a lot that we don't have such certain protection against. Lots of other STIs are still transmittable very easily through sexual contact, and you don't want to catch them either, believe me! But they don't carry the stigma that HIV does or the fear the virus still generates.

Here's another thing about U = U: the knowledge of being untransmittable helps HIV-positive people improve their mental health. It does this by reducing at least some of the strain of living with a virus that non-positive people still irrationally fear. When the wider community knows that the disease isn't something that can be spread so easily, they're less likely to react to an HIV-positive possible partner with fear and judgment.

And that can make it more likely that the HIV-positive person will adhere to treatment, will take their health seriously, and won't react with shame or self-destructive behavior in a world that can so often lack compassion and understanding.

So I encourage you to bring it up, to mention it to people, to share what U=U means for you. I know, on a publication like POZ, I'm preaching to the choir.

Still, we need to turn up the volume on the powerful U=U message. U=U is a good reminder of how far we've come as a global HIV community, of what we can do to take care of each other. Undetectable = Untransmittable is also a good affirmation of our collective health and strength.

Perhaps most importantly, U=U is a beautiful beacon of hope to those newly diagnosed, assuring them that HIV is not a death sentence; that a person living with HIV on successful treatment can live a long and healthy life. Of that, I'm 100% sure.

The Prevention Access Campaign is a terrific resource for everything you could ever need to know about U=U, the science, the global campaign, and more. They also offer a comprehensive course on their website, the U=U University <https://preventionaccess.com/university/>. Available to all and I highly recommend it.