



# A Guide to Talking About HIV

The words we use matter. When talking about HIV, certain words and language may have a negative meaning for people at high risk for HIV or those who are living with HIV.

**Consider using the preferred terms below to avoid promoting stigma and misinformation around HIV.**



**Problematic word or phrase:**

AIDS (when referring to the virus, HIV)



**Preferred word or phrase:**

HIV, HIV and AIDS (when referring to both)



**Why:** AIDS itself is not a condition. It is a range of conditions, or a syndrome, that occurs when a person's immune system is weakened by the HIV infection.



**Problematic word or phrase:**

To catch AIDS, To catch HIV,  
To pass on HIV



**Preferred word or phrase:**

To be **diagnosed** with HIV, To **acquire** HIV, To **transmit** HIV



**Why:** AIDS cannot be caught or transmitted. People become infected with HIV. HIV can be transmitted, but it is not hereditary.



**Problematic word or phrase:**

Body fluids



**Preferred word or phrase:**

Blood, amniotic fluid, semen, pre-ejaculate, vaginal fluids, rectal fluids, breast milk



**Why:** Only some body fluids transmit HIV. "Body fluids" covers all fluids coming from the body and not just those involved in HIV transmission. Be specific if you can.



**Problematic word or phrase:**

Victims, Sufferers,  
Contaminated, Sick



**Preferred word or phrase:**

People/person *with* HIV



**Why:** Some people with HIV feel that these terms imply that they are powerless, with no control over their lives. Other unhelpful terms negatively define people with HIV by the condition. These terms also segregate the people currently living with HIV.



**Problematic word or phrase:**

AIDS patient, HIV patient, Patient



**Preferred word or phrase:**

Person *with* AIDS, Person *with* HIV, Person *living with* HIV, HIV-positive person



**Why:** The term “patient” implies a constant state of illness that can be misleading and demoralizing. Outside of a clinical context, a person is not a patient.



**Problematic word or phrase:**

Positives, HIVers, AIDS or HIV carrier(s)



**Preferred word or phrase:**

HIV-positive people/person, People/person with HIV, People/person with AIDS



**Why:** A person is not HIV or AIDS. A person lives with HIV once infected with the virus, or progresses to having an AIDS diagnosis.

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Ending the HIV Epidemic