

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 persons living with HIV.

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



Problematic word or phrase:

AIDS, AIDS virus (when referring to the virus, HIV)



Preferred word or phrase:

HIV, HIV and AIDS (when referring to both)



Why: Being HIV-positive does not mean you have AIDS. AIDS is a range of conditions, or syndrome, that occurs when a person's immune system is weakened by 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. For example, you cannot transmit HIV through saliva or sweat. "Body fluids" covers all fluids coming from the body and not just those involved in HIV transmission. Be specific if you can.

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**Problematic word or phrase:**

Victims, Sufferers,
Contaminated, Sick

**Preferred word or phrase:**

People/person living
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.

**Problematic word or phrase:**

AIDS patient, HIV patient, Patient

**Preferred word or phrase:**

Person with an AIDS-related illness,
People/person living with HIV



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:**

People/person living 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.

Adapted from A Guide to Talking about HIV. U.S. Centers for Disease Control. <https://www.cdc.gov/stophivtogether/pdf/campaigns/Isht/cdc-hiv-together-stigma-talking-guide.pdf> Accessed March 30, 2020

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