

## Patient Glossary Terms

As part of the *See Us: Women Take a Stand on HIV* campaign, this glossary was developed to provide an overview of terms specific to women living with HIV. It is our goal to help ensure every woman does what she can to better understand her condition and ultimately live well with HIV.

These are terms you may hear from your healthcare provider or when reading information on HIV.



**Abstinence** The act of choosing not to do or have something, such as foods, alcohol or sex.<sup>1</sup>

**Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)** The most advanced stage of HIV. It can take 10-15 years for an HIV-infected person to develop AIDS; proper use of antiretroviral (ART) drugs can slow down the process even further.<sup>2</sup>

**Adherence** The act of taking a treatment as prescribed by a clinician (e.g., time of day, with or without food, daily, etc).<sup>3</sup>

**Adverse reaction** An unwanted effect caused by the administration of a drug. The onset of the adverse reaction may be sudden or develop over time.<sup>4</sup>

**Antiretroviral drugs** Medications for the treatment of HIV, a retrovirus.<sup>3</sup>

**Antiretroviral therapy** A combination of medications that act against HIV, a retrovirus.<sup>4</sup>

**Asymptomatic** The act of having no symptoms of a given disease/condition.<sup>3</sup>

**Bisphosphonates** A class of drugs used to strengthen bones.<sup>4</sup>

**Cancer** A term used for diseases in which abnormal cells divide without control and are able to invade other parts of the body.<sup>5</sup>

**CD4+ cell** A type of cell inside the body that fights infections such as HIV. HIV can bind to this type of cell. The CD4 cell count roughly reflects the strength, or weakness, of the immune system to defend against infection.<sup>3</sup>

**Cholesterol** A waxy substance mostly made by the body and used to produce steroid hormones. High levels can be associated with atherosclerosis.<sup>3</sup>

**Communicable disease** A disease that spreads from one person to another or from an animal to a person. The spread often happens via airborne viruses or bacteria, but also through blood or other bodily fluid. The terms infectious and contagious are also used to describe communicable disease.<sup>6</sup>

**Co-morbidity** The presence of more than one disease or condition in the same person at the same time.<sup>7</sup>

**Condom (male and female)** A product used during sex (including vaginal, anal or oral sex) to prevent the transmission of sexually transmitted infections, such as HIV, and/or the likelihood of pregnancy. The male condom is a thin rubber cover that fits over a man's erect penis. The female condom is a polyurethane pouch that fits inside the vagina.<sup>8</sup>

**Confidential testing** The act of identifying information, such as a person's name, that will be attached to their test results. The results will go in their medical record and may be shared with their healthcare providers and insurance company. Otherwise, the results are protected by local laws and cannot be shared without a person's consent.<sup>18</sup>



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**Counseling** Professional guidance of the individual by utilizing psychological methods, especially in collecting case history data, using various techniques of the personal interview, and testing interests and aptitudes.<sup>1</sup>

**Depression** A serious medical condition in which a person feels very sad, hopeless, and unimportant and often is unable to live in a normal way.<sup>1</sup>

**Diabetes** A condition characterized by raised concentration of sugar in the blood and urine due to problems with the production or action of insulin.<sup>3</sup>

**Diagnosis** A description of the causes of a patient's medical problems.<sup>3</sup>

**Disclosure** The act of informing another person or persons of the HIV-positive status of an individual.<sup>17</sup>

**Discrimination** The practice of unfairly treating a person or group of people differently from other people or groups of people.<sup>1</sup>

**Efficacy** How well something works.<sup>3</sup>

**Eligibility** The entitlement of an individual to receive services based on that individual's enrollment in a healthcare plan.<sup>14</sup>

**Epidemic** An occurrence in which a disease spreads very quickly and affects a large number of people.<sup>1</sup>

**Occupational exposure** Contact with a potentially harmful physical, chemical or biological agent as a result of one's work. For example, a healthcare professional may be exposed to HIV or another infectious agent through a needlestick injury.<sup>8</sup>

**False-negative** When a person has a medical condition but is diagnosed as not having it.<sup>3</sup>

**False-positive** When a person does not have a medical condition but is diagnosed as having it.<sup>3</sup>

**Family planning** Planning intended to determine the number and spacing of one's children through effective methods of birth control.<sup>1</sup>

**Frailty** The condition of being weak.<sup>1</sup>

**Hepatitis B virus** A bloodborne virus that attacks the liver. It is most commonly spread from mother to child at birth or from person to person in early childhood. It can also be spread via sexual transmission and the use of contaminated needles.<sup>10</sup>

**Hepatitis C virus** A bloodborne virus that causes the liver disease hepatitis C. The most common modes of infection are through unsafe injection practices; inadequate sterilization of medical equipment in some healthcare settings; and unscreened blood and blood products.<sup>11</sup>

**Hormone** A chemical that stimulates or suppresses cell and tissue activity.<sup>3</sup>

**Hormone replacement therapy** Medications used to make up for the decline or lack of natural hormones in a woman's body, typically around menopause.<sup>4</sup>

**Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)** A bloodborne virus. HIV disease is caused by infection with HIV-1 or HIV-2, which are retroviruses.<sup>4</sup>

**Human Papilloma Virus (HPV)** A group of wart-causing viruses that are also responsible for cancer of the cervix and some anal cancers.<sup>3</sup>

**Immune System** The body's mechanisms for fighting infections and eradicating dysfunctional cells.<sup>3</sup>

**Immunosuppression** A reduction in the ability of the immune system to fight infections or tumors.<sup>4</sup>

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**Latency period** A stage of the disease that HIV is living or developing in a person without producing symptoms or only mild ones.<sup>9</sup>

**Menopause** The point in time when a woman's menstrual periods stop. Menopause happens because the ovaries stop producing the hormones estrogen and progesterone. Once you have gone through menopause, you cannot get pregnant anymore.<sup>12</sup>

**Opportunistic infection** Specific infections that cause disease in someone with a damaged immune system.<sup>3</sup>

**Osteoporosis** A disease of the bones. It happens when a person loses too much bone, makes too little bone or both.<sup>4</sup>

**Pap smear** A specimen of cells from the cervix, usually obtained in scrapings from the opening, which may be examined by microscope to look for abnormalities.<sup>3</sup>

**Pathogen** Any micro-organism that can cause disease. There are four main types bacteria, fungi, protozoa and viruses.<sup>3</sup>

**Pneumonia** A common lung infection caused by bacteria, a virus or fungi.<sup>13</sup>

**Prevention of mother-to-child transmission** Strategies used to prevent the spread (transmission) of HIV from an HIV-infected mother to her child during pregnancy, during labor and delivery or when breastfeeding (through breast milk).<sup>8</sup>

**Prophylaxis** Taking a drug to prevent an illness.<sup>3</sup>

**Replication** The process of viral reproduction.<sup>3</sup>

**Resistance** A drug-resistant HIV strain is one that is less susceptible to the effects of one or more anti-HIV drugs.<sup>3</sup>



**Risk reduction** Actions that can decrease the likelihood that individuals, groups or communities will experience disease or other health conditions.<sup>15</sup>

**Seroconversion** The production of antibodies in response to an antigen.<sup>1</sup>

**Seronegative** A negative antibody result in a blood test.<sup>3</sup>

**Seropositive** A positive antibody result in a blood test.<sup>3</sup>

**Sexual orientation** The inclination of an individual with respect to heterosexual, homosexual and bisexual behavior.<sup>1</sup>

**Sexual rights** The fulfillment of sexual health is tied to the extent to which human rights are respected, protected and fulfilled. Sexual rights embrace certain human rights that are already recognized in international and regional human rights documents, other consensus documents and in national laws.<sup>15</sup>

**Side effects** Any additional, unwanted, effect caused by a drug.<sup>3</sup>

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**Sexually transmitted disease (STD)** Any of various diseases or infections that can be transmitted by direct sexual contact including some (as syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia and genital herpes) chiefly spread by sexual means and others (as

hepatitis B and AIDS) often contracted by nonsexual means—called also STD.<sup>16</sup>

**Stigma** Social attitudes that suggest that having a particular illness or being in a particular situation is something to be ashamed of. Stigma can be questioned and challenged.<sup>3</sup>

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