

MEDIA GUIDE TO TERMINOLOGY



The media plays a valuable role in informing the public about HIV and AIDS. However, some terms which can be misleading about HIV/AIDS, or degrading to HIV-positive people, are not helpful. Throughout the ARE YOU HIV PREJUDICED? campaign, NAT will be speaking out about stigma and discrimination as well as providing information, case studies and reports. It is vital that our texts and presentations support the objectives of the campaign by not using stigmatising language and terminology.

Below are some examples of problematic terms, together with suggestions of alternative terms and phrases.

USE: HIV AND AIDS

The term HIV should be used to refer to the virus, which is transmitted, and AIDS to describe the condition where a person becomes ill because of underlying HIV infection. Where a description of the topic or subject e.g. national AIDS strategy, we use the term AIDS to be inclusive of the full social and political concept as well as medical conditions. HIV/AIDS is used where it is the title of an existing document or work programme.

USE: HIV INFECTION, HIV POSITIVE, HIV AND AIDS

Don't use: AIDS if the intention is to refer to HIV

AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome) is a range of conditions which occurs when a person's immune system is seriously damaged by HIV. This damage means the system has difficulty fighting off infections, which eventually puts the persons' life at risk. Someone who has HIV infection has antibodies to the virus but may not have developed any of the illnesses which constitute AIDS.

Don't use: AIDS Virus

AIDS is a syndrome, not a virus. Therefore there is no such thing as the 'AIDS virus'. There is only HIV - the virus that causes the medical syndrome known as AIDS.

Don't use: HIV Virus

'V' in the acronym HIV stand for Virus. There is no need to add the word virus after HIV.

USE: PERSON LIVING WITH HIV or PERSON LIVING WITH HIV OR AIDS, or PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV AND AIDS (PLWHA) or PEOPLE WITH HIV

Don't use: AIDS victim or AIDS sufferer

Many PLWHA feels these terms imply they are powerless, with no control over their lives.

Don't use: AIDS carrier This term is stigmatising and offensive to many people with HIV/AIDS. It is also incorrect: the effective agent is HIV. It wrongly implies that HIV/AIDS is contagious. This term may also give the false impression that people can protect themselves by avoiding anyone who they know has AIDS, or by choosing a sexual partner based on their appearance.

USE: BLOOD, SEMEN, PRE-EJACULATE, VAGINAL FLUIDS, BREASTMILK

Don't use: Body fluids

The term body fluids covers all fluids of the body, not just those implicated in HIV transmission. Confusion about the body fluids that can transmit HIV is a common cause of fear and misunderstanding about HIV which continues to cause discrimination against PLWHA. HIV is found in a range of body fluids, but it is passed from person to person in very specific ways. These ways involve blood, semen, pre-ejaculate, vaginal fluids and breast milk of a person with HIV entering the body of another person.

USE: PERSON LIVING WITH HIV OR AIDS, HIV POSITIVE PERSON

Don't use: AIDS patient

Use 'AIDS patient' only to describe someone who has AIDS and who is, in the context of the story, in a medical setting. Most of the time, a person with AIDS is not in the role of the patient.

USE: PLWHA, or PERSON WITH AIDS, or PERSON WITH HIV

Don't use: full blown AIDS

A person is assigned an AIDS diagnosis when they meet particular clinical criteria amounting to a serious threat to life, i.e. an 'AIDS defining illness'. Many people recover from this episode, and returned to work and an active life living with AIDS, particularly when effective treatment is provided.

USE: AFFECTED COMMUNITIES, HIGH RISK BEHAVIOUR (UNSAFE SEX, SHARING NEEDLES)

It is high risk behaviours that can spread HIV, not high risk groups. Referring to 'high risk groups' not only further stigmatises already marginalised groups but can lull other people who don't identify with those groups into a false sense of security. It is often more accurate to refer directly to sex without a condom, or sharing injecting equipment, rather than generalise by using 'high risk group'.

USE: CHILDREN WITH HIV, PLWHA, or PEOPLE WITH MEDICALLY ACQUIRED HIV or AIDS

Don't use: innocent victims

Usually used to describe HIV positive children or people who acquired HIV medically. It wrongly implies that people infected in other ways are somehow 'guilty' or deserving of punishment. This fuels discrimination, and should be avoided.

USE: SEX WORKER, or CHILD EXPLOITATION, depending on the context.

Don't use: Prostitute, streetwalker.

The terms prostitute and streetwalker are often used to belittle, and imply a way of life rather than a form of employment.

USE: INJECTING DRUG USER (IDU), PERSON WHO INJECTS DRUGS

Don't use: Junkie, drug addict

Terms such as 'junkie' rely on a stereotyped image that is misleading and stigmatising. Drug use is only one part of that person's life.

ARE YOU HIV PREJUDICED?

For more information visit the campaign website at www.areasyouhivprejudiced.org

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Disclaimer: NAT has made every effort to ensure that the information contained in this fact sheet is accurate at the time of going to press. However, NAT cannot be held liable for any inaccuracies.

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