



HIV Terminology and Appropriate Language Use Guidelines

We have seen significant advancements in HIV treatment and prevention in recent years. However, the language used when talking or writing about HIV is often outdated and stigmatising. Challenging and eliminating HIV-related stigma is a guiding principle of HIV Ireland and we understand the role appropriate language use has in this. These guidelines have been informed by our work and existing relevant language and terminology standards*. This is a living document that will be reviewed regularly.

[*UNAIDS Terminology Guidelines 2015](#)

[*INPUD Words Matter! Language Statement and Reference Guide](#)

[*UISCE – Stigmatising Language and Preferred Terminology](#)

Inappropriate or Incorrect Language	Why?	Appropriate Language or Preferred Term
HIV/AIDS	This terms implies that HIV and AIDS are the same thing or that they are interchangeable. They are not.	HIV and AIDS or HIV or AIDS
HIV infections e.g. There were 500 HIV infections this year. e.g. PrEP is a drug that can prevent HIV infection.	The word 'infections' can be viewed as stigmatising language.	HIV transmissions HIV acquisitions HIV diagnoses HIV notifications Examples: There were 500 new HIV notifications this year. PrEP is a drug that can prevent HIV acquisition.
HIV infected person/ woman/man/mother/infant	A person is more than their medical diagnosis. Use 'People First Language' which puts the person before the diagnosis or label.	A person living with HIV A person who is HIV positive
Catch HIV Spread the Virus Transmit HIV	Implied value judgement and possible associations with blame.	Acquire HIV Become HIV positive
Disclose/disclosing your HIV-positive status	In this context, the term 'disclose' or 'disclosing' may imply that a person intentionally set out to conceal their status.	Share/sharing your HIV-positive status
Non-compliant	Using the term 'non-compliant' can indicate a refusal of care. Use 'poor adherence' which can instead prompt an exploration of underlying reasons for this.	Poor adherence
HIV is no longer a death sentence	A death sentence refers to a criminal prosecution.	HIV is no longer a terminal condition.
Burden of HIV	Can suggest negative and discouraging views of living with HIV implying that being HIV positive weighs a person down.	Challenge of HIV
AIDS virus	There is no 'AIDS virus'. The virus associated with AIDS is the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV).	HIV

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AIDS Test	There is no test for AIDS.	HIV test
AIDS victim AIDS sufferer HIV sufferer Suffers from AIDS Suffers from HIV	The words 'victim', 'suffer' and 'sufferer' are disempowering and can imply powerlessness. People living with HIV are not victims or sufferers. The term 'AIDS' should only be used when referring to a person with a clinical AIDS diagnosis.	A person living with HIV
Innocent victim(s)	Often used to describe children with HIV, this can imply that people who have acquired HIV in other ways are guilty.	A child/children/person living with HIV
AIDS Carriers	No one carries AIDS. AIDS is a stage of HIV infection when a person's immune system is damaged by HIV, leaving them vulnerable to opportunistic infections.	People living with HIV People who are HIV positive
Full-blown AIDS	This term implies there is such a thing as 'half-blown AIDS'. AIDS is simply AIDS. Referring to a term such as 'full-blown AIDS' is an unnecessary exaggeration.	AIDS
Died of AIDS	This is inaccurate. AIDS is a syndrome i.e. a group of illnesses resulting from the weakening of a person's immune system.	Died of an AIDS related illness
High-risk group	Can be stigmatising and also may imply that others are exempt from risk.	A key population vulnerable to... or People who are disproportionately affected by...
High-risk behaviour(s)	This term is judgemental and stigmatising.	Engaging in an action (e.g. using non-sterile injecting equipment or sex) that can make a person more vulnerable to acquiring

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Prostitute / Prostitution	These terms are very demeaning and judgemental, and the word 'prostitute' does not reflect the fact that sex work is a form of employment for a sex worker, not a way of life.	Sex Worker Sex Work
Injecting drug user / Injector	It defines a person solely on the basis of a practice they engage in.	Person/people who inject drugs
'Dirty' needle	Can be stigmatising because it implies that HIV is dirty.	The use of non-sterile injecting equipment.
Men who have sex with men (MSM).	The term MSM seeks to include men who do/may not identify as gay or bisexual and also heterosexual men who may have sex with other men. However, it's use excludes those who do self-identify as gay or bisexual.	Gay, bisexual and men who have sex with men (gbMSM)
MSM Community or community of MSM	Implies that all gay and bisexual men and other men who have sex with men belong to one specific social unit, identity, culture, values etc.	Population of... e.g. population of gbMSM
Unprotected Sex	An outdated term that is no longer accurate or precise when referring to reducing the risk of HIV acquisition. In addition to using condoms, people can choose a number of strategies to reduce the risk of HIV acquisition including HIV treatment and PrEP.	Sex without a Condom; Condomless Sex; Condomless Sex with PrEP; Condomless Sex without PrEP; Sex not protected by antiretroviral prevention methods.
Safe Sex	This term may imply complete safety. The term safer sex more accurately reflects the concept that choices and actions can be made and/or taken to reduce or minimise the risk of HIV and/or STI acquisition and transmission e.g. using condoms, using PrEP to prevent HIV, choosing to have non-penetrative sex.	Safer Sex
Passive / Active	Implies sexual dominance / submission.	Top / Bottom Receptive / Insertive
Clean (relating to HIV and/or STIs)	Stigmatising of those with HIV and/or STIs. Implies that those with HIV and/or STIs are 'dirty'.	HIV negative All results clear

Inappropriate or Incorrect Language	Why?	Appropriate Language or Preferred Term
Clean (relating to drug use)	Stigmatising and implies that people who use drugs are 'dirty'.	Drug/Substance free
Clean, dirty (referring to drug test results)	These terms are stigmatising because they associate symptoms of a condition (positive drug tests) with being dirty.	Negative/Positive Substance free
A promiscuous person	A judgemental term that should be avoided.	Has multiple partners
Prostitute Hooker Rent boy	Stigmatising and offensive slang terms.	Sex worker Escort
Queer Faggot Fag	Stigmatising and offensive slang terms.	Gay Bisexual Likes guys
Tranny Transsexual Transgenders T-girl	Outdated, slang and sometimes offensive.	Transgender Trans person Trans man Trans woman Non-binary person
Drug Addicts / Drug Abusers	These terms are seen as derogatory and disrespectful. They label a person solely by a condition. The terms imply moral judgement. Using person first language recognises our collective humanity.	Person/People who use drugs
Any racialised terms	Outdated and can cause offense.	People / person of colour



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