

Knowing and Understanding your Viral Load

A guide to using the materials with adolescents living with HIV and their caregivers

This discussion guide is to introduce and support the use of a set of educational resources developed for adolescents living with HIV to help them to know and understand their viral load and the importance of viral load testing.

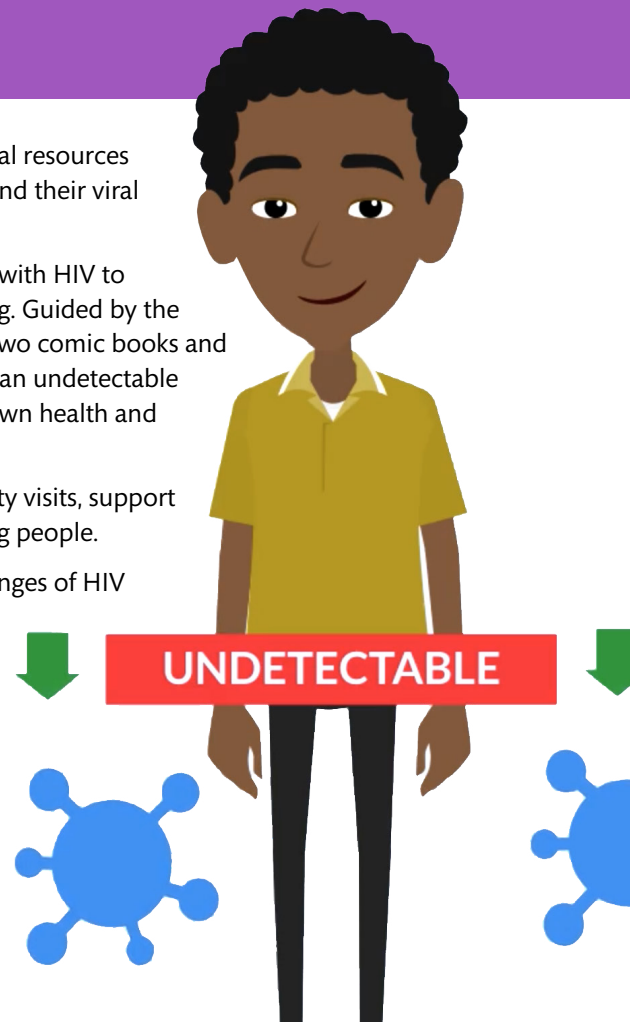
Research was carried out by CeSHHAR and Zvandiri with young people living with HIV to assess their understanding of viral load and the importance of viral load testing. Guided by the research a set of resources has been developed that include two animations, two comic books and a set of activity cards. These materials explore how young people can achieve an undetectable viral load and the potentially enabling effects of this on adherence and their own health and well-being, as well as onward disclosure and transitioning to adulthood.

The resources are aimed at young people and can be used during health facility visits, support groups sessions or interactions between caregivers, peer supporters and young people.

It is hoped that each film can be used to stimulate discussion about the challenges of HIV treatment and the specific difficulties young people can have. The two animated stories remind young people that there is support available to them and help them understand that achieving an undetectable viral load is possible.

It is hoped that the animations can be shown to groups of young people or shared through the comic books, where presenting videos is not possible.

To support discussion around the films, a set of questions has been provided below. Use the questions to get people talking and, where young people are comfortable, you can to ask them to talk about their own understanding of viral load and experiences of viral load testing.



KEY MESSAGES

Throughout the discussions there are some key messages that you should ensure are covered.

1

Viral load testing is very important for monitoring how well HIV treatment is working.

2

Viral load testing should be done regularly.

3

An undetectable viral load shows that your HIV is under control.

4

Having an undetectable viral load means you cannot transmit the virus to someone else.

5

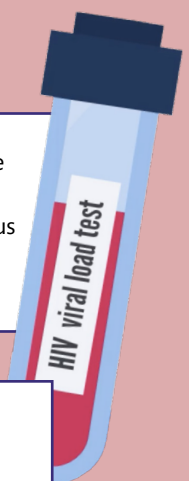
You are likely to be healthy and be physically unaffected by your HIV positive status. HIV should not stop you from striving for and achieving any of your goals and dreams.

6

Having an undetectable viral load does not mean HIV has gone. It is still in your body but at very low levels that will not affect you or others while it is controlled.

7

Viral load can go up especially with gaps in treatment or other issues that mean the Antiretroviral medication (ARVs) is not working well. Regular testing is important for monitoring any changes.



FILM 1 / COMIC 1



<https://bit.ly/3kAv8GG>

Not just a number! Understanding your viral load

In film 1/ comic 1 we meet Farai with his mother and peer supporter Sibona. They are discussing the results of a viral load test that is due the next day. Farai discusses with the nurse and learns about an undetectable result which he shares with Sibona.

Questions for the group:

1. Who makes up the support network around Farai? What support does each person offer?
2. What practical things can be done to help Farai continue taking his treatment every day?
3. What does the nurse say is important about viral load testing?
4. What does an undetectable viral load mean for Farai?
5. What other information does Sibona share around knowing your viral load?
6. What did you learn from the film?

FILM 2 / COMIC 2



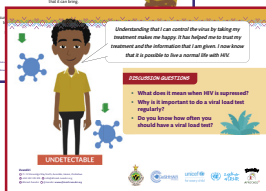
<https://bit.ly/3wOEao7>

Taking charge of HIV: The journey to undetectable.

In film 2 / comic 2 we meet Rachel who is facing challenges with her treatment and whose viral load result is high. She is supported by the nurse to understand the importance of monitoring her viral load and her peer supporter Sibona offers advice and support.

Questions for the group:

1. What are some of the challenges Rachel is facing with her HIV treatment?
2. What does the nurse explain about Rachel's viral load results?
3. What help and support does Sibona offer?
4. What plans does Rachel have to work towards lowering her viral load?
5. What did you learn from the film?



Activity Cards

There is also a set of activity cards to support further discussions with groups or individuals. Each card contains an image from our animations and a quote from a young person who took part in the research. The quotes are there to open up discussion and provide real experiences of young people and to raise some additional issues to those in the animations. There are also cards that provide key facts and messages around knowing and understanding viral load that you can use to summarise at the end of sessions.



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