



Eliane

U = U

People who take HIV medication every day as prescribed suppress the virus successfully and can no longer pass on the virus to their partners, can have healthy children and have the same life expectancy as people without HIV.

I used to be scared when I was cooking and cut myself. I would almost panic thinking I could infect my children, after all I have done in preventing a HIV infection before they were born. Several years ago very important information came out. When people with HIV take their medication as prescribed, the virus cannot be detected in the blood anymore. They are not cured of HIV, but they cannot infect anyone else. This is the explanation of the slogan Undetectable equals Untransmittable or U=U. Although the studies were done on sexual transmission of HIV, it became even more clear to me that if my viral load is undetectable, I am surely not going to infect my children when cutting myself with a knife. I started feeling pretty confident!

In 2017 I travelled to Burundi on a mission to educate the Batwa Indigenous people on HIV and AIDS. During an empowerment workshop for women and men who are living with HIV we talked about many issues they are facing in daily life, including stigma. Then I discovered that they were still unaware of the information on U=U. When I explained it to them, they were first in shock of not knowing such powerful information and

Facts about HIV

- HIV is a virus that can only survive in the human body.
- The virus cannot be passed on through hugging or kissing, sharing the same toilet, mosquito bites, small wounds.
- When untreated, HIV is found in blood, sperm, vaginal fluid and breast milk.
- Taking HIV medication daily as prescribed, successfully suppresses the virus.
- Medication has to be continued to maintain the viral load suppressed.
- If the viral load is suppressed, there is zero risk of sexual transmission of HIV.

then they were relieved, just like I was! One woman said: “I was very scared of infecting my partner, while I have been so many years on medication! Why did my doctor never tell me this?” One couple said that they were told to always use condoms. Some single men and women said they were afraid to start dating, and that they did not even dare to get close with anyone. When they learned more about U=U, they were so happy! I enjoyed seeing the smile in their faces. “We have got our freedom back!” They went home empowered and ready to continue their lives without fear of infecting anyone. They are determined to keep on taking their medication every day, so that their viral load will stay undetectable!

Here in the Netherlands I educate people using the U=U information, because I believe it is a good instrument to fight the stigma. I was wearing my U=U T-shirt when I met a woman from my Djembé group. She asked me about the U=U message. I explained it and she was surprised to hear how much progress was made! Her reaction was: “You are the first person to inform me on this! So I can date a HIV positive person without any problem?” As long as this person keeps on taking medication and stays with undetectable viral load, the virus cannot be transmitted sexually. She thanked me for this information and she promised to share it with her network.

Hiv Vereniging

The Dutch Association of People Living with HIV (Hiv Vereniging) represents the interests of all people with HIV in the Netherlands, irrespective of background.

We provide information about living with HIV and organise all kinds of meet-ups.

Servicepunt

Our team of expert volunteers can be contacted for any question about living with HIV, by telephone on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays from 14:00 – 22:00 hrs, or by email: servicepunt@hivvereniging.nl.

See www.hivvereniging.nl