

Key messages

- Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) attacks the immune system. If untreated, it can progress to AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) which severely effects the immune system.
- Current antiretroviral treatments can result in individuals managing the virus while supporting and improving their overall health and quality of life.
- It is possible to have an undetectable viral load, meaning that HIV is effectively untransmissible, this is called **U=U**.
- Understanding HIV transmission, acquisition, treatments, testing and stigma is crucial for people living with HIV, and those tasked with social and clinical care, as this can promote support, improve health outcomes and reduce stigma.

Why is this important?

Health awareness – Knowing our HIV status allows people to manage health effectively. Early detection will allow prompt treatment, better overall health and prevention of developing AIDS related illnesses. HIV does not discriminate.

Public health - Knowing your HIV status helps prevent further transmission and protects both yourself and the community.

Access to treatment - Early testing and intervention enable effective treatment, with ART being more effective the sooner it's started.

What should we do?

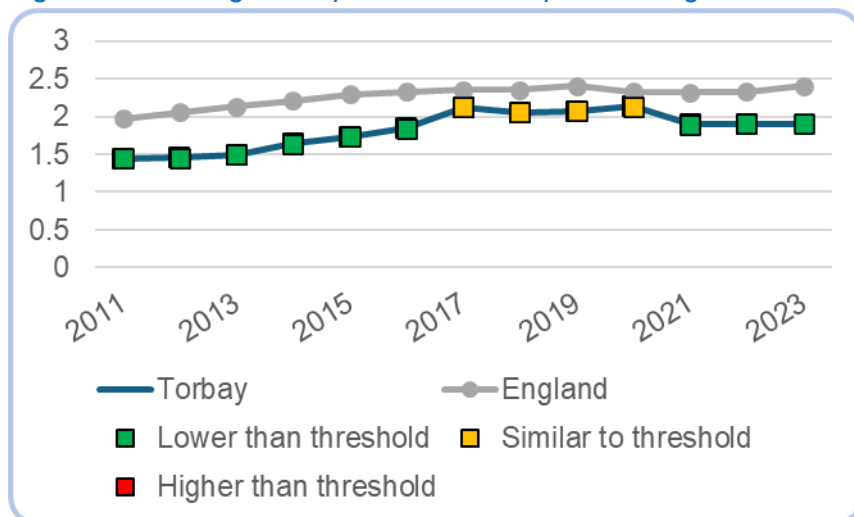
Training- Staff in adult and children's social care settings can develop knowledge and skills to support people living with HIV.

Training will help to improve awareness of HIV, improve outcomes, address health inequalities and reduce stigma.

By improving knowledge and skills, it can enable workforces to appropriately support colleagues and people living with HIV

Awareness empowers communities to get the treatment they need without the worry of feeling out of place or stigmatised.

Figure 1: HIV diagnosed prevalence rate per 1000 aged 15 to 59 for Torbay.



There has been an increase in the prevalence of HIV cases per 1,000 people in England¹. The 2017 NICE HIV testing guidelines² define a high prevalence area of between 2 and 5 per 1,000 aged 15 to 59 years. They recommend that routine HIV testing for all general medical admissions and new primary care registrants is implemented where diagnosed HIV prevalence exceeds 2 in 1,000 population aged 15 to 59. This graph shows that in 2023 Torbay was a low prevalence area, but from 2016/17 to 2020/21 was above 2

per 1,000 and a high prevalence area. Torbay is sensitive to changes in these numbers of new diagnosis and meeting the NICE threshold for increased HIV testing.

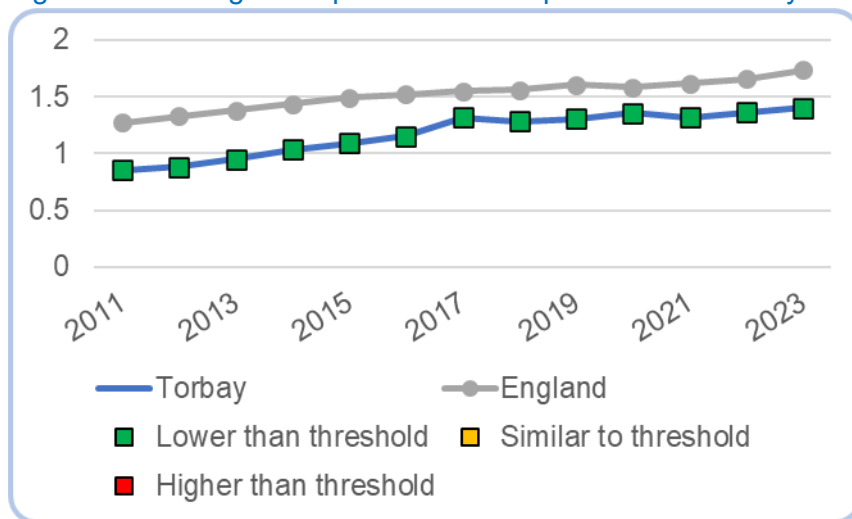
¹ Sexual and Reproductive Health Profiles - Data | Fingertips | Department of Health and Social Care

² Recommendations | HIV testing: increasing uptake among people who may have undiagnosed HIV | Guidance | NICE

In Torbay, 50% of people living with HIV are over 50, yet we still see new diagnoses amongst all age groups.

England has set an ambition to end HIV transmission, AIDS and HIV related deaths by 2030 through its 'Towards Zero' action plan³. As part of this plan, England aims to reduce new HIV infections in England by 75% by 2025 and to achieve zero new HIV infections by 2030. In 2023, Torbay saw no significant change in testing rates, with 921.4 per 100,000 tested, totalling 2680 people. Maintaining stable HIV testing rates in Torbay is crucial for early detection and treatment of HIV.

Figure 2: HIV diagnosed prevalence rate per 1000 for Torbay



Torbay has a higher proportion of older people⁴, which includes older adults living with HIV. Of the 196 people living with HIV in Torbay in 2023, many will be over 59 year olds, who may reside in care settings or receive medical support.

This has implications for the future of care and support for this part of the ageing population. The 2022 Positive Voices report by UKHSA⁵ included participants from Torbay. This national survey offers important insights about the quality of life, health and wellbeing of adults, as well as the use of local

health and social care services. Stigma and discrimination still feature highly in the lived experiences of adults living with HIV, with only one in eight people sharing their HIV status with most people in their life and just one in ten disclosing to healthcare staff. In 2023, Torbay has a higher prevalence than geographical neighbours in Devon and Plymouth. Many residents are unaware of this, leading to further potential stigma and discrimination.

U=U (Undetectable = Untransmissible)

U=U means if a person living with HIV has an undetectable viral load through consistent and effective use of antiretroviral therapy (ART), they cannot sexually transmit the virus to others. HIV treatments are effective, allowing people, where diagnosed promptly to live healthy lives with HIV. Antiretroviral therapy treatment significantly reduces viral load, making transmission nearly impossible. Knowledge of this principle can significantly reduce stigma and discrimination, improve mental health by boosting confidence and reduce isolation, while encouraging adherence to ART. It also prevents new HIV infections, enhances the quality of life for people with HIV, and supports public health goals by reducing the acquisition of HIV.

U=U is a powerful and positive message because:

1. **Reduces stigma-** knowing that HIV cannot be easily transmitted helps people to feel more comfortable.
2. **Encourages testing and treatment-** effective management motivates people to get tested and start treatment.
3. **Promotes ART-** encourages individuals to use ART and adhere to treatment schedules.
4. **Prevents HIV acquisition-** U=U is crucial for controlling acquisition of HIV

³ [Towards Zero - An action plan towards ending HIV transmission, AIDS and HIV-related deaths in England - 2022 to 2025 - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/towards-zero-action-plan)

⁴ <https://www.torbay.gov.uk/council/policies/planning-policies/hena/hena-4/>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/hiv-positive-voices-survey/positive-voices-2022-survey-report>

For more information you can use [Towards Zero - An action plan towards ending HIV transmission, AIDS and HIV-related deaths in England - 2022 to 2025 - GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/towards-zero-action-plan)