

Language for HIV Cure

Community-preferred language to describe cases of HIV cure and control

HIV cure research is seeing momentum with new research, discussion and debate happening. This document shares the most up-to-date community-preferred terminology related to cure research to help those presenting new research or sharing information with lay audiences. Terminology was reviewed by global community stakeholders.

Defining HIV Cure

Cure

Definition: Removal of all replication-competent virus.

Preferred Alternative Phrases

"Eradication", "Clearance"

Terminology to Avoid

"Sterilizing cure", "Natural cure"

Examples

Timothy Ray Brown: ("Berlin Patient"): Remained cured with no detectable intact virus for > 12 years until his death from a reoccurrence of cancer in 2020.

Adam Castillejo ("London Patient"): ART interruption was initiated in September 2017 and there is no evidence of viral rebound or detectable intact virus. HIV-specific antibodies have waned.

Marc Franke: ("Dusseldorf Patient"): ART interruption was initiated in November 2018 and there is no evidence of viral rebound or detectable intact virus. HIV-specific antibodies have waned.

New York Patient: ART interruption was initiated in 2020 and there is no evidence of viral rebound or detectable intact virus. HIV-specific antibodies have waned.

Paul Edmonds: ("City of Hope Patient"): ART interruption was initiated in 2021. Viral load remains undetectable and there is no evidence of viral rebound. HIV-specific cellular immune responses have waned.

A small group of elite controllers, known as "exceptional elites", may be considered "cured". These individuals have sero-reverted without intervention and replication-competent virus cannot be detected using the most advanced assays. There is no consensus on terminology for these individuals.

Current examples of a cure have all occurred after a stem-cell transplant with a donor naturally immune to HIV. In presentations, these examples should always be qualified as a procedure done to treat cancer rather than an approach under investigation to cure HIV.

Viral Control

Definition: Undetectable virus off antiretroviral therapy (outside of a clinical setting) using a standard clinical assay. Non-standard assays can detect the presence of ongoing replication at low levels.

Preferred Alternative Phrases

“Viral control off therapy”, “ART-free virologic control”, “post-intervention control”, “Virologic suppression off therapy”, “investigational control”

Terminology to Avoid

“Functional cure”, “Remission”

Example

South African Child: Received early treatment in the CHER trial. Remains off therapy for more than 10 years with an undetectable viral load using standard clinical assays. Small traces of viral DNA in blood plasma still detectable.

Remission

Definition: An individual who was thought to have all replication-competent virus removed when samples were analyzed using non-clinical assays, however viral rebound occurred.

No alternative phrases exist for remission

Example

Mississippi Child: Received treatment within 30 hours of birth. ART interruption at 18 months with no replication-competent virus detected using non-clinical assays for 27 months before rebound occurred.

Person-Centered Language

Preferred Alternative Phrases

Transmission terms for humans

“HIV acquisition”, “Acquisition”, “Perinatal”, “Vertical” (US pediatric only),

Reference terms for humans (person or cells)

“Person with HIV”, “Long-term survivor”, “Participant”

Terminology to Avoid

Transmission terms for humans

“Infected”

Reference terms for humans (person or cells)

“HIV-infected”, “Subject”

