

SUMMARY ON PREFERRED LANGUAGE

OLD USAGE	CURRENT PREFERRED USAGE
Commercial sex work	Sex work <i>or</i> commercial sex, <i>or</i> the sale of sexual services*
Developing countries	Low and middle income countries
Direct sex workers	Brothel-based sex workers <i>or</i> formal sex workers
Indirect sex workers	Non-brothel-based sex workers <i>or</i> informal sex workers
Fight against AIDS	Response to AIDS
High(er) risk groups	Key populations at higher risk*
HIV/AIDS	HIV unless specifically referring to AIDS
HIV/AIDS	AIDS diagnosis; HIV-related disease
HIV/AIDS epidemic	AIDS epidemic <i>or</i> HIV epidemic
HIV/AIDS prevalence	HIV prevalence
HIV/AIDS prevention	HIV prevention
HIV/AIDS testing	HIV testing
People living with HIV/AIDS	People living with HIV*
Prostitute	Sex worker
Prostitution	Term to use in respect to juvenile prostitution, otherwise use sex work
Intravenous drug user	Injecting drug user*
Most vulnerable to infection	Most likely to be exposed to HIV (unless specifically referring to vulnerability)
Prevalence rates	Prevalence
Risky sex	Unprotected sex
Sharing (needles, syringes, etc.)	Using contaminated injecting equipment (if referring to HIV transmission)*
Sharing (needles, syringes, etc.)	Using non-sterile injecting equipment (if referring to risk of exposure to HIV)*
Vulnerable groups	Vulnerable populations <i>or</i> populations most likely to be exposed to HIV <i>or</i> populations at higher risk of exposure

¹ Compiled from UNAIDS Editors Notes, May 2006 and Kaiser Media Manual on HIV/AIDS, 2005

SENSITIVE LANGUAGE

The following table includes a list of language to be sensitive to when reporting on HIV/AIDS. It is intended to aid in an understanding of the complexities of reporting on HIV. In some cases, you may want to consider an alternative word or phrase. In others, you may end up using language that could be considered sensitive. The important thing is to be aware of the issues that surround these terms and their usage.

WRONG TERMINOLOGY	WHY	CORRECT TERMINOLOGY
AIDS infected person	People can be infected with HIV, but no one can be infected with AIDS, because it is not a virus or single disease. AIDS is a syndrome of opportunistic infections and diseases that can develop at the end stage of the continuum of HIV disease.	Person living with HIV, HIV-infected person
AIDS/ HIV carrier	This is a stigmatizing term, which focuses on an individual as a carrier of disease. It is important to emphasize that HIV is a disease that can be managed and lived with, rather than focusing on the diseased status of the individual.	HIV-positive, Person/ man/ woman living with HIV
AIDS Orphan	This term may stigmatize the child and the child’s condition and may also be misinterpreted to mean that the child is HIV-positive. The child may not be HIV positive but may have lost one or both parents due to HIV.	Orphans, Children affected by HIV/AIDS
AIDS sufferers	Many people living with HIV are healthy and happy. People are infected with HIV can have periods of relatively good health. They should not be portrayed as suffering.	HIV-positive people, People living with HIV
AIDS test	There is no test for AIDS. There is a test that determines the presence of HIV antibodies; therefore it tests for HIV infection, not AIDS. The progression to AIDS is the last stage of HIV disease.	HIV test, HIV antibody test
AIDS victims Innocent victims	People who have AIDS are not victims. To call someone a victim stigmatizes them by implying powerlessness.	To have AIDS, To live with HIV

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AIDS virus	There is no such thing as an AIDS virus. The virus associated with AIDS is called the Human Immunodeficiency Virus, or HIV.	HIV
Body fluids	This phrase is very broad and can refer to a range of body fluids, not all of which can transmit HIV. It is always better to be specific.	Specify the fluids (e.g., blood)
“Catch AIDS”	HIV is not a contagious disease but an infectious disease. As an infectious disease, HIV is transmitted from bodily fluid to bodily fluid such as blood semen, vaginal fluid, breast milk. Since HIV is not a contagious disease, it cannot be caught or transmitted through casual contact – sneezing, coughing.	Contract HIV Become infected with HIV, Become HIV positive
“Died of AIDS”	AIDS in itself is not a disease, it is a syndrome. People do not die from a syndrome. They die from opportunistic infections or diseases, such as pneumonia, that their immune system cannot fight as a result of HIV infection. However, ‘to die of AIDS’ is common usage and can be used.	Died of an HIV-related illness
Drugs for AIDS	This may be misinterpreted as meaning that there are cures for HIV/AIDS. It is important to clarify that while there are drugs to treat the symptoms, prevent and treat opportunistic infections and slow the progression of the disease, they cannot completely rid the body of the virus.	Drug therapy, AIDS-related drugs, Drugs to prevent and treat opportunistic infections (OI)
Full-blown AIDS	This is an older slang term that is rarely used anymore. Progression to AIDS is one stage of HIV disease.	AIDS

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Gay / homosexual/ bisexual	<p>These terms, particularly gay and bisexual, refer to an identity that may or may not be tied to a behavior. In many countries and cultures, men who have sex with other men may not perceive themselves as gay, bisexual, or homosexual.</p> <p>It is important to distinguish between behavior (which can place an individual at increased risk of transmitting and acquiring HIV) and sexual identity, particularly when talking about HIV transmission.</p>	Men who have sex with men (MSM)
HIV-infected person	“HIV-positive” is preferable to “HIV-infected,” as the latter term places emphasis on the infection, rather than the individual living with it	Living with HIV, HIV-positive, (Having) contracted HIV
HIV virus	<p>This term is redundant.</p> <p>HIV stands for “Human Immunodeficiency Virus”</p>	HIV
Innocent (victim), Guilty	This infers that certain modes of transmission are worse than others and that some HIV-positive individuals deserve their status.	<i>Omit the word</i>
Prostitute	This term has a negative connotation. It does not accurately describe situations in which women may be forced into exchanging sex for money or food due to gender inequality and lack of alternative economic opportunity.	Sex worker
Promiscuous	This term is based on the perception of an individual’s behavior. It places a negative connotation on an individual who may look a certain way, have or be perceived to have more than one sexual partner and does not accurately reflect the social context of transmission. For example, an individual may be in a polygamous marriage, which is socially and religiously acceptable in many societies. It is important not to use language that judges others behaviors or is based on misconceptions or stereotypes.	<i>This is a value judgment that should be avoided</i>

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Risk group vs. Risk behavior	<p>The phrase “risk group” may be interpreted as referring to the only people who are at-risk of contracting HIV. Individuals who do not belong to these groups may gain a false sense of security from infection.</p> <p>Additionally, individuals in a “risk group” may not practice risky behavior. An example of this is an injection drug user who uses clean needles that are not shared.</p>	Risky behavior
Safe sex	There is always an inherent risk when having sex.	Safer sex
Scourge, plague, dreaded disease	These words are overly dramatic and over used. They also may imply judgment and it may be better to substitute with less dramatic language such as medical terms.	Disease, Epidemic, Illness
Sufferer, Victim	These terms imply passiveness and helplessness.	<i>Avoid using these terms</i>
Suspected (of having HIV), Admitted (to having HIV)	These terms may foster stigma because they imply secrecy.	<i>Avoid using these terms</i>