

# Finding the right words

There is increased consensus about the appropriate terminology to use when reporting on HIV and it is important to know the terms to avoid.

Preferred	Inaccurate/ Inappropriate
HIV HIV and AIDS	AIDS virus Full-blown AIDS HIV/AIDS
A person living with HIV [PLWH] A person who is HIV positive (if diagnosed)	AIDS or HIV carrier AIDS 'timebomb' A person is HIV A(n) (HIV or AIDS) victim/sufferer
HIV test HIV antibody test HIV antigen test	AIDS test
Transmitting HIV Infected by HIV Acquiring HIV	Transmitting AIDS Infected by AIDS Catching HIV (or AIDS)
Recklessly infecting	Intentionally/ deliberately/knowingly infecting (when applied to a reckless transmission charge)
Safer sex	Safe sex

The UNAIDS Terminology Guide – also known as its 'Editors' Notes For Authors' – provides an extensive account of recommended usage in the field of HIV and AIDS. Below are some additional terminology drawn from this Guide which journalists might find useful.

**Gay men/Men who have sex with men** – the phrase 'gay men' is used to describe people who self-identify as gay (i.e. there is a 'gay' cultural, as well as sexual identity). The broader term used internationally, 'men who have sex with men', sometimes abbreviated to MSM, can be used to describe all men who engage in same-sex sexual activity, irrespective of how they identify themselves and what other sexual relationships they engage in.

**Injecting Drug User** – abbreviated as IDU – this is now the preferred term rather than intravenous drug user (not all drugs injected are injected intravenously).

An **epidemic** is said to occur when more people are found to have an illness in a relatively large, but specific area, over a set time than would normally be expected, while an **outbreak** is far more localised. A **pandemic** affects an entire continent or the whole world. Preferred usage is to write 'pandemic' when referring to global disease and to use 'epidemic' when referring to country or regional level.

**Sex worker** – this is increasingly the preferred term rather than prostitute. Prostitute and prostitution are used to refer to juvenile prostitution.

## Further information

UNAIDS Editors' Notes for Authors  
[www.unaids.org](http://www.unaids.org)

International Federation of Journalists media guide  
[www.ifj.org](http://www.ifj.org)