

# HIV KNOWLEDGE AND ISLAM



“It is those who are endued with  
understanding that receive admonition”  
(The Holy Quran, Surat Az-Zumar, verse 9)



## Foreword



Positive East believes that we can only achieve success in meeting the challenges that HIV presents individuals and communities if we act inclusively. **No community can be left behind.** No community should be without the information, advice,

and support to understand how to best tackle the continuing HIV challenge. We believe that for information to be effective, it needs to be created with communities. It is only in this way that the information created, will resonate with, and be relevant to specific communities of people.

In following this belief, we have created this resource with community members from the Muslim faith. We are very grateful to the community for its help and advice. We hope that this will be a valuable resource in understanding where we are today in meeting the challenge that HIV presents. We hope too that this will help people to navigate these HIV challenges and ensure that our success with HIV is an inclusive one.

**Mark Santos**  
Director, Positive East

 **PositiveEast**



# Introduction

40 million people are living with HIV globally, 780,000 people died of HIV related illnesses and there were 1.7 million new transmissions in 2018 alone. The United Kingdom has an estimated 102,000 people living with HIV. The epidemic is largely concentrated among certain key populations, including black African populations and underserved communities such as Muslims, who are estimated at 5% of the entire UK population (ONS 2019).

HIV has indiscriminately affected communities globally and the Muslim community has not been an exception. In the UK, the rates of HIV amongst the Muslim population, highlights the need to educate our community about HIV prevention and testing. HIV related stigma and discrimination is one of the largest barriers to HIV testing and treatment adherence in our community.



Late diagnosis of HIV remains one of the key challenges in the UK. In 2018, 43% of diagnoses were made at an advanced stage of HIV disease progression. Advanced disease and deaths are preventable through earlier diagnosis. Islam is a faith that is close to human nature. Islam emphasises the importance of preserving human life and maintaining a healthy lifestyle; this can be achieved by promoting health screening and educating others about HIV prevention.

The ultimate goal of this resource is to educate people of Islamic faith, our leaders and our communities, to enable us to support HIV prevention work, increase the rates of HIV testing, reduce undiagnosed HIV, reduce late diagnosis and address HIV related stigma in Muslim communities.



“..and if anyone saved a life, it would be as if he saved the entire humanity..”

(The Holy Quran, Surat El-Maaida, verse 32)

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# Break the Silence

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is the virus that may cause AIDS if it is not treated. AIDS stands for Acquired ImmunoDeficiency Syndrome. AIDS is a collection of illnesses that take advantage of a destroyed immune system of a person.

HIV is passed from one person to another through:

- Sex without using a condom\*
- Sharing injecting equipment
- A mother living with untreated HIV can pass it on to her baby during pregnancy, at the time of birth or through breast feeding

\*HIV cannot be passed on through sex without a condom if the person living with HIV is on effective HIV medication or if the HIV negative partner is taking PrEP.

Anyone on effective HIV medication, taken as prescribed with an undetectable viral load for six months, cannot pass on HIV sexually. This is what we call “Undetectable is Untransmittable,” “U=U.”



# **Prevention of HIV Transmission is Fundamental**

**(Trace, Test, Treat, Prevent)**

## **HIV transmission can be prevented by:**

- Testing people for HIV from communities that are disproportionately affected by HIV and individuals who have been exposed to HIV
- Someone living with HIV taking HIV treatment effectively so that the virus is undetectable in the blood and cannot be passed on
- Using condoms if the HIV status of the partner is unknown
- Taking Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) within 72 hours after someone has been exposed to HIV. PEP is a 28-day course of HIV medication. You can call any sexual health clinic or Accident and Emergency for advice



- Taking Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) before potential exposure to HIV. PrEP is a course of HIV medication that stops people acquiring HIV. It can be used by anyone who is at risk of acquiring HIV. Visit [pe.shl.uk](http://pe.shl.uk) for more advice, under “Sexual Health Support.”
- Use new needles each time someone injects drugs and avoid sharing needles.
- Share knowledge and raise awareness about HIV to reduce HIV stigma and demystify the disease.

### The Holy Quran mentions prevention:



“Oh Allah is my trust, The Lord of the Thrones of supreme. Whoever has a condition should prevent passing it on..”

(Surat Tauba, Verse 129)

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# Myths

Myths breed Fear

Fear breeds Stigma

Stigma breeds Ignorance

Ignorance is a barrier to prevention

- HIV is a punishment or curse from Allah.
  - Allah will never punish his servants but guide them into the right path. Allah is merciful and compassionate.
- HIV is a conspiracy to exterminate black people
  - HIV does not only affect black people, but it affects the human race. The “H” in HIV stands for “Human”
- HIV targets specific people
  - Any human being is a potential target for HIV
- People who are circumcised cannot acquire HIV
  - Circumcision reduces the chance of acquiring HIV by 60%
- HIV can be cured through prayer alone
  - HIV cannot be cured. The virus can be effectively managed by HIV medication
- HIV can be passed on by drinking from the same glass or cup, sharing a toilet seat, shaking hands, sharing clothes, using the same swimming pool, hugging, or sitting near each other.





- o HIV cannot live outside of the body for a long time. It lives in bodily fluids and at body temperature only. Once exposed to external conditions it dies quickly. HIV cannot survive the acidity in saliva, sweat and tears.
- o HIV is **not** found in the following fluids: tears, sweat, saliva, urine, vomit, faeces

## Stigma

### The Consequences of Stigma

Attack the disease, not the people who have it.

Stigma can result in shame, humiliation, isolation, lack of adherence to medication and abuse. This will ultimately lead to unnecessary and avoidable death.

We must be mindful of our language and actions, not to reinforce stigma, but instead to support our brothers and sisters in difficult circumstances.



Abu Huraira recalled Allah's Messenger (SAW) as saying: Avoid suspicion, for suspicion is the gravest lie in talk and do not be inquisitive about one another and do not spy upon one another and do not feel envy with the other, and nurse no malice, and nurse no aversion and hostility against one another. And be fellow-brothers and servants of Allah.

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## Support and Care

Many people living with HIV are living lives free from discrimination and stigma.

You can support those who are in need by:

- Supporting people living with HIV to take their medication and to access essential services
- Advocating for those in need
- Providing emotional support and being compassionate
- Challenging HIV stigma wherever you find it



“...If you enter the house of a sick man, then only speak good words, for truly the Angels will confirm what you’d Say ,...”

Hadith of The Prophet (SAW)

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# Epilogue

This resource is for Islamic faith leaders to educate and raise awareness of HIV in the wider Islamic community. It has been developed with the input of the Islamic leaders so that it complies with the ethics and acceptable norms of Islam in discussing HIV and sexual health.



This resource is intended to break down the stigma associated with HIV and sexual health, myths, conspiracy theories, attitudes and misconceptions, inequalities of health as well as addressing other barriers to HIV testing and access to HIV support services. I would like to thank the Islamic faith leaders who have contributed to the development of this resource and the staff and volunteers of Positive East who have made it possible for this resources to be produced with such quality and precision. We hope all the users of this resource will find it useful and user friendly.

Thank you very much.

**Badru Male**

**HIV Prevention and Testing Co-ordinator – Positive East**



## **Glossary**

**AIDS – Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome**

**ARV – Anti-Retroviral (HIV medication)**

**HIV – Human Immunodeficiency Virus**

**PEP – Post Exposure Prophylaxis**

**PrEP – Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis**

**PLHIV – People Living with HIV**

**U=U – Undetectable equals Untransmittable**

## **Further Reading**

[positiveeast.org.uk](http://positiveeast.org.uk)

[avert.org](http://avert.org)

[aidsmap.com](http://aidsmap.com)

[nat.org.uk](http://nat.org.uk)

[BHIVA.org](http://BHIVA.org)



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Book an HIV self test: [positiveeast.org.uk/hiv-testing](https://positiveeast.org.uk/hiv-testing)

Join our Fundraising campaign:

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