

Language for HIV Cure

Community preferred language to describe cases of HIV Cure

HIV cure research is in a heightened moment with lots of new research, discussion and debate happening. This document shares the most up-to-date community preferred terminology about the cure space to help those in discussions, in covering or in translating new research. It was developed with the input of the Martin Delaney Collaboratories Community Engagement Coordinators and Community Advisory Boards.

Defining HIV Cure

Classic cure

DEFINITION:

Removal of all replication-competent virus

This term is used to describe:

1. An individual who has received a stem cell transplant with a donor who has a natural immunity to HIV
2. An individual who has cleared the virus through immune mechanisms in the absence of antiretroviral therapy

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE PHRASES

“classic cure”, “cure”, “eradication”,
“spontaneous cure”, “traditional cure”

EXAMPLES

Stem cell transplantation

Timothy Brown (“Berlin Patient”)

Remained cured with non-detectable 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.

“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.

“City of Hope”

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.

EXAMPLES

Immune clearance

Loreen Willenberg

Elite controller diagnosed in 1992. Never taken ART. No detection of viral DNA in blood and tissue.

Esperanza Patient

Diagnosed in 2013. No intact viral DNA detected in blood and tissue.

Remission is an acceptable term to use when it is uncertain if a classic cure has been achieved. If virus is detectable, the community preferred terminology is “viral control”.

PHRASES TO AVOID

“Sterilizing cure”, “Natural cure”

Viral Control

DEFINITION:

Immunologic suppression of the virus to undetectable levels off therapy

This term is used to describe:

1. A person with HIV-specific immune markers and a detectable inducible reservoir using non-commercial assays

PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE PHRASES

“Durable control”, “Viral control off therapy”, “immune-based control”, “ART free virologic control”

PHRASES TO AVOID

“Functional cure”, “Remission”

EXAMPLES

Control

French Teenager

Treated early for perinatal HIV. ART interruption occurred at six and has remained undetectable off ART for >19 years.

South African Child

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

eCLEAR Participant

Remains undetectable off therapy ~4 years after treatment interruption. Received a latency reversing agent plus a broadly neutralizing antibody shortly after ART initiation.

