



Faith & Health

A Toolkit by Faith Leaders

Supported by



Contents

Faith in Action: Why you should read it?	1
Background	1
What is HIV? What is AIDS?	2
Myths about HIV	3-5
How is HIV transmitted?	6
Prevention & Testing	7
Treatment	8
Stigma	8-9
Finding Strength in Scripture & Faith	10
Resources and Support	11
Aim of the project	13
The Partnership	14



Faith in Action: Why you should read it?

This toolkit represents a partnership between faith leaders across our communities and the Caribbean and African Health Network (CAHN). We came together with one purpose: to serve our community with knowledge rooted in both faith and compassion.

Health challenges, including HIV, touch many lives within our congregations and neighbourhoods. As faith leaders, we recognise our unique position to provide not just spiritual guidance, but also practical wisdom that can protect health and save lives.

This resource is born from conversations where faith and health found common ground. It is not merely an information booklet—it is a testament to our commitment to fellowship, care, and the belief that knowledge shared in love can transform lives.

As you read through these pages, remember that this knowledge is meant to be shared. It equips us to better support one another, to speak truth with kindness, and to extend the hand of understanding to those who may feel isolated or judged.

This is how we live our faith in action—by ensuring that no one in our community walks alone.

Together in fellowship and care,
The Faith Leaders and CAHN

Background

Introduction - Faith in Action

The prevalence of HIV new infections continues to be a significant public health challenge in the UK, disproportionately affecting certain groups, including Black communities. 6,402 people were newly diagnosed with HIV in the UK in 2023, an

increase compared to 2022. Most of these diagnoses were for heterosexual men and women, particularly from minoritised groups. 54% of new diagnoses were people of Black African background, showing a continuing lack of equity and equality in HIV prevention and access to health services.

To end new cases by 2030, HIV prevention should be the responsibility of the whole health service. We need to make it easier and simpler for everyone to be able to get an HIV test whether at a sexual health service or through the post. Everyone who could benefit from PrEP should be able to get it much more easily than they can right now - including making it available online.

What is HIV? What is AIDS?

HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Virus

HIV is a virus that weakens your body's natural defences against illness. It targets and destroys a type of white blood cell called CD4 cells, which play a crucial role in fighting off infections. Without treatment, HIV makes it harder for your body to stay healthy. Over time, this can lead to a condition called AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome), where the immune system becomes severely compromised.



AIDS: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

AIDS is the advanced stage of HIV infection, when the body struggles to fight everyday infections. Today, healthcare providers often refer to this as "late stage or advanced HIV."

With modern treatment, many people with HIV never develop AIDS and can lead long, healthy lives.

Myths about HIV

Common misconceptions about HIV that create barriers to testing, treatment, and support. Stigma can cause discrimination and unfair treatment of people living with HIV.

Since the 1980s, so much has changed about HIV, but myths and stigma still exist. Some of the myths are about how HIV is passed on, where HIV came from, and HIV treatment and the reality of living with HIV today.

Breaking down these myths is essential for reducing stigma.



Myth: "HIV and AIDS are the same thing"

Reality: HIV is the virus. AIDS (now often called late-stage HIV) is the name for a collection of illnesses caused by this virus if untreated. Many people who have HIV will never have AIDS. This is because advances in HIV treatment mean that HIV is now a long-term manageable condition.

Myth: "HIV is a death sentence"

Reality: Before advances in HIV treatment, someone diagnosed with HIV in the 1980s and early 1990s may have only been given a few years to live. But today people with HIV who receive treatment can live long, healthy lives. People with HIV can expect to live as long as their HIV negative peers. The over-50s are now the fastest growing group of people living with HIV, showing that people are living well with the condition for decades. The challenge is now to support people to live well with HIV as they get older.

Myth: "If you have sexual intimacy with someone living with HIV, you will get HIV too"

Reality: People taking effective HIV treatment cannot pass on the virus through sex. When treatment reduces the virus to undetectable levels, it cannot be transmitted.

Myth: "People with HIV can pass it on during everyday contact"

Reality: HIV is only transmitted through specific body fluids (except saliva) getting inside another person's body. You cannot get HIV from hugging, kissing, sharing utensils, toilet seats, or swimming pools. It is absolutely safe to share objects someone with HIV has touched or used to eat or drink from. Sharing a razor presents a small theoretical risk of transmitting HIV, but sharing razors is never advisable due to the possibility of transmitting bacterial and viral infections including hepatitis B or hepatitis C.

Myth: "People with HIV can't have children"

Reality: With effective treatment, the risk of passing HIV to a baby is just 0.1%. Thanks to antenatal screening, treatment to block transmission and caesarean (c-section) delivery, only 0.3% of people with HIV (including people with a higher viral load) passed on HIV to their babies.



Myth: "HIV only affects gay men"

Reality: HIV can affect anyone regardless of sexuality, gender, age or ethnicity. In the UK, approximately half of people with HIV are gay or bisexual men, and half are heterosexual people. In 2022, the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) announced that the number of new HIV diagnoses among heterosexuals is higher than for gay and bisexual men. Gay and bisexual men are still more impacted by HIV relative to population size, but targeted interventions for this group have led to one of the big success stories of the epidemic.

Late diagnosis of HIV (when someone has been living with HIV unawares for a while) remains high, particularly in those who are of Black African ethnicity, older people, women, and heterosexual men.

Myth: "Condoms are the only way to prevent HIV"

Reality: Condoms are effective, but there are other prevention options like PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis), a medication that HIV-negative people can take to protect themselves from infection.



How is HIV transmitted?

HIV can be transmitted through five main routes:

1) Unprotected sexual contact

HIV can pass through vaginal or anal sex without condoms or other barriers.

2) Sharing injection equipment

Using needles previously used by someone with HIV can transmit the virus directly into the bloodstream.

3) Mother-to-child transmission

HIV can be transmitted from a pregnant woman to her baby during pregnancy, childbirth, or breastfeeding if the mother has a detectable viral load and doesn't receive treatment to prevent transmission.

If a pregnant woman is HIV positive and does not have treatment she could pass HIV onto her child. Of the mothers who are HIV Positive and receive suitable treatment in the UK, 99.9% give birth to babies who are HIV negative.

4) Blood transfusions

While extremely rare in the UK due to blood screening, contaminated transfusions can transmit HIV.

5) Occupational exposure

Healthcare workers may be exposed through needle-stick injuries or contact with infected blood.

Important: HIV is a fragile virus that doesn't survive long outside the body. It is NOT transmitted through:

- Sharing food or drinks
- Insect bites
- Hugging or kissing
- Swimming pools
- Using the same toilets
- Coughing or sneezing



Prevention & Testing

Testing

Knowing your status is the first step. HIV testing in the UK is free, confidential, and available at:

- Sexual health clinics
- GP surgeries
- Community testing projects
- At home with self-test kits

PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis)

PrEP is a combination of HIV drugs that can stop the virus taking hold. It can be used after the event if you've been at risk of HIV transmission.

To work, PrEP must be taken within 72 hours (three days), and should be taken as soon as possible, ideally within 24 hours.

PrEP is not a 'morning after pill' for HIV, and it's not guaranteed to work. It's meant as an emergency measure to be used as a last resort, such as if a condom fails during sex. Taking PrEP will not protect you from other sexually transmitted infections or unplanned pregnancy.

Condoms

Condoms create a barrier that protects against HIV and other STIs. They're also effective for family planning.

Know your partner

Avoid unprotected sex. Both Christian and Islamic teachings encourage believers to make choices that protect their physical and spiritual health."



Treatment

For people living with HIV, taking medication reduces the virus to undetectable levels. This protects your health and means you cannot pass on the virus sexually.

How treatment works

HIV treatment stops the virus from reproducing in your body. While it doesn't cure HIV, it can reduce the virus to undetectable levels. Treatment usually involves taking one pill daily.

When to start treatment

UK guidelines now recommend starting treatment immediately after diagnosis. They currently recommend that anyone with HIV who is ready to commit to treatment should start it regardless of their CD4 count (a measure of the health of your system). Early treatment leads to better health outcomes and prevents transmission.

Stigma

Stigma means attaching negative labels to something that's wrongly seen as shameful or unacceptable.

For example, there is a stigma attached to having a mental illness, which can make it hard for people to ask for help and support if they're experiencing mental health problems.

HIV stigma refers to negative attitudes about people with HIV. Stigma can lead to discrimination, treating people with HIV differently than those without HIV. HIV stigma can affect people's health and wellbeing, and discourage people from engaging in HIV testing, prevention, and care.

Why is there stigma around HIV?

HIV stigma often stems from:

- Lack of accurate information
- Moral judgments about how someone contracted HIV
- Fear and misconceptions

Stigma can appear as:

- Hostility
- Physical or verbal abuse
- Social exclusion
- Workplace discrimination

People can experience stigma in any area of their life - within your relationship, family, at work, or at places where you socialise such as church.

“I knew there was stigma before I was diagnosed - I knew HIV was a taboo, but it’s difficult experiencing it.”

Joseph Cotgrave, Living with HIV, THT



Remember: People living with HIV are protected by the Equality Act 2010, making discrimination illegal.

Finding Strength in Scripture & Faith

Living with HIV affects our physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing. For people of faith, sacred texts provide comfort, guidance, and strength during challenging times.

Christian Teachings

God's Promise of Healing

"He sent his word, and healed them, and delivered them from their destructions." - Psalm 107:20

"But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." - Isaiah 53:5

Overcoming Fear

"Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness." - Isaiah 41:10

Love and Compassion

"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these." - Mark 12:31

God's Complete Care

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgives all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases, Who redeems your life from destruction, Who crowns you with lovingkindness and tender mercies." - Psalm 103:2-4

Islamic Teachings

"And We send down of the Quran such things that are healing and mercy for the believers" - Surah Al-Isra (17:82)

"Allah does not burden a soul beyond that it can bear" - Surah Al-Baqarah (2:286)

"For indeed, with hardship [will be] ease. Indeed, with hardship [will be] ease." - Surah Ash-Sharh (94:5-6)

The Quran encourages self-protection from harm (Chapter 4, Verse 59) and emphasizes kindness toward those who are ill (Chapter 17, Verse 23).

Resources and Support

Greater Manchester

In Greater Manchester, HIV tests are widely available through various channels, including NHS sexual health clinics, your GP, and community-based testing services.

A breakdown of where to access testing and other sexual and reproductive services in Greater Manchester:

- **Northern Sexual Health, Contraception and HIV Service:**
www.thenorthernsexualhealth.co.uk
This service offers a range of services, including HIV testing, at various clinics across Greater Manchester.
- **BHA for Equality**
www.thebha.org.uk
Offers free and confidential HIV testing, including rapid testing, home HIV testing kits at various locations and through community outreach.
- **PaSH Partnership**
www.gmpash.org.uk
Provides community-based testing and support for people with HIV.
- **LGBT Foundation**
www.lgbt.foundation
Offers rapid HIV testing services for LGBTQ+ people.
- **Your GP**
HIV tests can be arranged through your general practitioner.
- **Emergency Departments**
The Manchester Royal Infirmary, Wythenshawe Hospital, and North Manchester General Hospital, routinely test for HIV and hepatitis C.
- **Superdrug Health Clinic**
www.healthclinics.superdrug.com
Instant HIV tests and home test kits.
- **Better2Know**
www.better2know.co.uk
Provides a range of testing options, including rapid tests at their clinics, home test kits, and a "We Come2You" service.

Greater London

In Greater London, you can access HIV tests at sexual health clinics, some GP surgeries, charities like the Terrence Higgins Trust, some contraception and young people's clinics, and even through home testing kits. Many of these services, including those at sexual health clinics, are free.

- **Sexual Health Clinics:**

These clinics, often called sexual and reproductive health clinics, offer free HIV testing and other sexual health services like STI testing, contraception, and more.

- **GP Surgeries:**

Some GP surgeries offer HIV testing. You can ask your doctor or practice nurse if your surgery provides this service.

- **Terrence Higgins Trust**

www.tht.org.uk

The Terrence Higgins Trust operates testing centres and provides information on self-testing.

- **Contraception and Young People's Clinics**

www.shswl.nhs.uk/young-people

Some clinics that offer contraception and services for young people may also offer HIV testing.

- **Do It London**

www.doitlondon.org

ffers free home testing kits for many London residents

- **Safe STEPS**

www.cahn.org.uk/safe-steps

Safe STEPS is a free and inclusive sexual health service designed with your needs in mind. We understand that sexual health is about more than just testing—it's about feeling understood, respected, and supported.

London

Aim of the project

This project aims to engage Black Majority Faith Communities in London and Greater Manchester to co-create resources that reduce stigma and increase awareness of HIV prevention. Through a series of workshops and a targeted campaign, we will address stigma and equip faith leaders with culturally relevant tools to promote HIV awareness and prevention.

The initiative focuses on the 4C's:

- Convenience
- Consistency
- Competency
- Confidence

Aligning these 4 principles with Trust, Language, Culture, and Faith. By collaborating with faith groups and their faith leaders, who hold considerable influence within these communities, the project aims to break myths and stigma around HIV, encouraging open discussions and promoting HIV prevention, testing, and treatment.

Programme Objectives

1. Engage Black Majority Faith Leaders
2. Facilitate HIV Awareness and Education
3. Co-Produce a Culturally Relevant HIV Resource
4. Launch a Targeted HIV Campaign
5. Challenge HIV Stigma in Black Communities



The Partnership

About CAHN

The Caribbean & African Health Network (CAHN) mission is to end health inequalities and wider disparities for Caribbean & African people in a generation.

CAHN collaborates with community groups, faith networks, and cross-sector partners, and takes a leading role in strategic engagement; ensuring that the voices and lived experiences of the Black community is central to public policy and practice.

For more information: www.cahn.org.uk



Partnership agreements

Our work with faith communities involves agreements covering: Confidentiality, Dispute resolution & Terms of collaboration. To know more about contact health@canh.org.uk.

About The Faith Leaders

CAHN undertook a detailed power mapping of Black Majority Faith Institutions across London and Greater Manchester, identifying leaders from a range of Christian, Muslim denominations and other faiths. These leaders play a central role in their communities; both as spiritual guides and trusted influencers on health, wellbeing, and social issues. The mapping assessed their reach, relationships, and potential to drive positive change within Black communities.

Faith communities in this Toolkit: Greater Manchester & London

- Christ United Ministries International
- Holy Land Eye of the Lord Church
- Islam Ahmadiyya Group
- RCCG Pathfinder Church (Manchester)
- RCCG Breakthrough Church
- World Harvest Christian Church
- RoyalHouse Chapel International
- World Harvest Christian Church Youth Ministry

Faith & Health

2025

For more information contact us at
health@cahn.org.uk

