

Today is World AIDS day

ITM calls to end stigma and stereotypes surrounding living with HIV.

01-12-20



Dit is de omschrijving

Today is World AIDS Day with the theme of 'global solidarity, shared responsibility'. In the run-up to this day, ITM has launched a [mouth mask campaign](#), #letstalkpositive2020. For this purpose, 1200 mouth masks were made with "Let's talk positive" on one side and "U=U" on the other side. This stands for "undetectable=untransmittable". When a person living with HIV is on effective treatment, their viral load becomes undetectable, and at this stage HIV can no longer be transmitted through sexual contact. This campaign invites people to change the negative discourse about living with HIV, to provide support to the affected community.

Hundreds of people have participated in our campaign from all walks of life on social media, among them infectious diseases specialist Erika Vlieghe, Antwerp Governor Cathy Berx, and Deputy Prime Ministers Petra De Sutter and Frank Vandenbroucke. Bruce Richman, the renowned activist and founder of the Prevention Access Campaign, the organisation that launched the undetectable equals untransmittable (U=U) message has expressed his support by posting his photo on Twitter. In recent weeks, Vhiva, ITM's HIV peer support group has distributed these face masks within our institute and other HIV reference centres; and Sensoa, the Flemish centre of expertise for sexual health, gave them out to their staff, volunteers and people living with HIV. Other stakeholder organisations such as the Antwerp University Hospital (UZA), pharmacists, asylum seekers' centres, the migration advice centre, community health centres, çavaria and Lumi also received the masks, along with the message to share a selfie with the mouth mask on their social media with the hashtag #letstalkpositive2020.

Stigma is still present and prevents HIV positive people from reaching out to their community. With this campaign, we want to dispel the stigmas and stereotypes surrounding living with HIV and to tell a positive story together. "We are getting positive reactions from our patients who consider this campaign to be very supportive," says Cora Lamonte and Wenne Mertens, social nurses at ITM who launched this campaign. Although the campaign officially ends on World AIDS Day, the message should live on! ITM is calling to continue spreading this positive message of solidarity also after 1 December, online and offline alike. We hope that by wearing the masks important conversations will be sparked that contribute to changing the narrative around living with HIV.

The mask campaign was made possible by Gilead.