

Q & A for community press release

Why is it important to study this question?

Use of condoms is the best way to minimize risk of transmission of HIV when having sex. But in reality this does not always happen, and condoms can break. We need to understand what is the risk when having unprotected sex for people in whom viral load levels are suppressed by therapy. This is in order to be able to counsel patients, and to understand the potential effects of wider use of treatment on reducing future transmission.

Does this study encourage people not use a condom when participating in the study?

No. We encourage all partnerships to use condoms on all occasions when they have sex. If all couples follow this advice then we will not be able to estimate the risks through unprotected sex. This would be a good outcome of the study, as we would understand more about what level of counselling is needed to lead to 100% condom use. However, experience from previous studies suggests that some couples will continue not to use condoms.

Who is eligible to enter the study?

Serodifferent couples (one is HIV+ve and the other is HIV-ve) for whom the HIV+ve partner is on therapy and who have had unprotected penetrative anal or vaginal intercourse in the past month.

In some countries it is illegal for an HIV-positive person to have unprotected sex with an HIV-negative person without telling them of their HIV status – how is this issue addressed in the PARTNER study?

We are only studying sex between couples where the HIV-ve person is fully informed of the HIV infection of their partner and is freely entering the study in this knowledge. All participating partners, HIV+ and HIV –ve provide written informed consent. This consent for the HIV-ve partner includes confirmation that he or she was informed of the HIV status of the HIV+ve partner at the time of having sex in the past month. The study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee.

Who is funding the study and how is it organised?

The study is funded by the National Institutes for Health Research. It is being co-ordinated jointly between the Copenhagen HIV Programme (CHIP) and the Research Department of Infection and Population Health at UCL, London. Currently, there are 58 clinical sites, all in Europe.

Where can potential participants learn/hear more about the study?

www.partnerstudy.eu