

Specialised Services

Spotlight on HIV

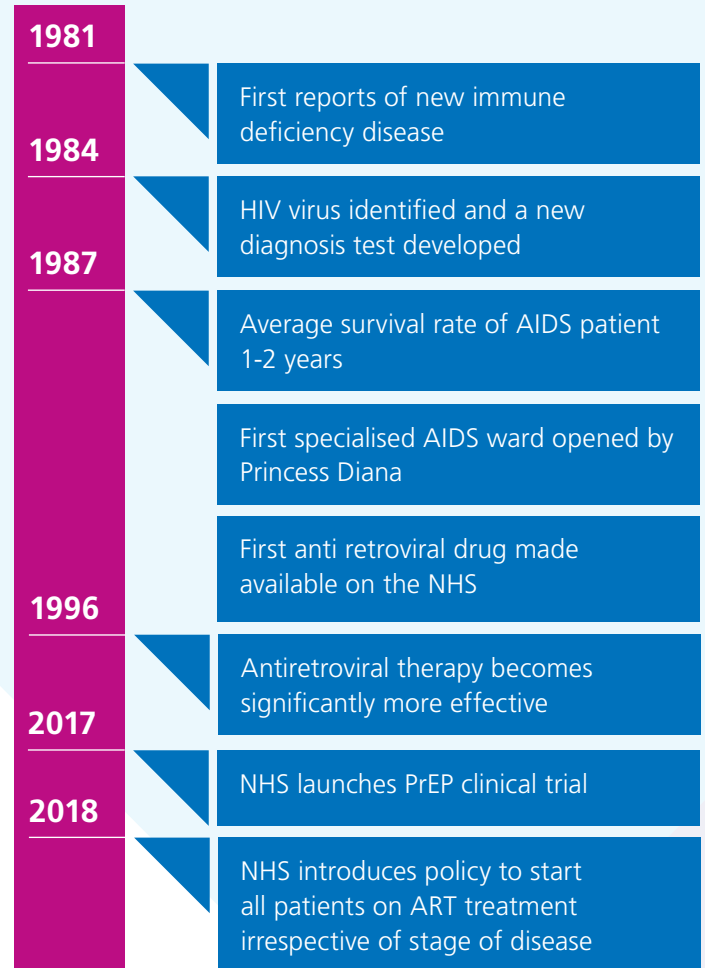
The treatment of HIV infection has been one of the most outstanding medical achievements over the last 25 years. If diagnosed and treated early, HIV can now be managed as a long term condition and life expectancy is similar to that of the general population.

But when the infection first appeared in 1981 it was a major challenge. Multiple patients began to present with severely damaged immune systems, resulting in infections and cancers which took their lives. Very little was known about the disease, how it was transmitted, how to treat it and who was at risk. This resulted in a high level of stigma and fear. By the end of 1987 in England there were more than 7000 people with HIV, around a thousand with AIDS and several hundred had died.

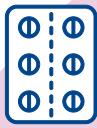

Local authorities, community organisations and the NHS came together to develop new ways of caring for patients. Scientists identified the HIV virus for the first time in 1984 and a test for diagnosis was developed soon after. The first specialised ward for the treatment of patients with HIV/AIDS in England was opened by Diana, Princess of Wales at the Middlesex Hospital in London in April 1987 and other specialist wards soon followed in other NHS hospitals.

The first antiretroviral drug - a new treatment to prevent the growth of the HIV virus - was introduced on the NHS in 1987, but it wasn't until 1996 when antiretroviral treatment (ART) became more effective that patient outcomes began to improve significantly.

Today, clinical outcomes for HIV in England are among the best in the world. Care is provided through more than 100 NHS specialist clinics, testing has increased and patients can now choose to start ART earlier. The number of patients presenting with advanced disease is falling. In 2017 the NHS launched a large scale clinical trial for PrEP, a new drug which prevents transmission of the disease.



New HIV diagnoses ↓ **28%** between 2015 & 2017

98% of HIV patients are on ART  **93,385** people accessed HIV care in 2017 

Up to **13,000** people can enrol on the PrEP trial
Figures from Public Health England, annual HIV data tables and health protection report

The future

International research continues to investigate a cure for HIV. In the meantime, the PrEP trial is expected to significantly reduce HIV transmission, reducing the number of newly diagnosed patients each year.

The number of people living with HIV over 50 is growing. They will be more vulnerable to cancers and age related illnesses so health care must evolve to ensure their needs are met. New antiretroviral drugs continue to be developed which are more efficient and better tolerated. Health services will continue to address the issue of HIV stigma and improve the quality of life for people with HIV.