

HIV/AIDS 101 – GLOSSARY

HIV

The virus that causes Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS). HIV is in the retrovirus family, and two types have been identified: HIV-1 and HIV-2. HIV-1 is responsible for most HIV infections throughout the world, while HIV-2 is found primarily in West Africa.

AIDS

A disease of the body's immune system caused by the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). AIDS is characterized by the death of CD4 cells (an important part of the body's immune system), which leaves the body vulnerable to life-threatening conditions such as infections and cancers.

IMMUNE SYSTEM

The collection of cells and organs whose role is to protect the body from foreign invaders. Includes the thymus, spleen, lymph nodes, B and T cells, and antigen-presenting cells.

T-CELL

A type of lymphocyte (disease-fighting white blood cell). The "T" stands for thymus, where T cells mature. T cells include CD4 and CD8 cells, which are both critical components of the body's immune system.

CD4 CELL

Also known as helper T cell or CD4 lymphocyte. A type of infection-fighting white blood cell that carries the CD4 receptor on its surface. CD4 cells coordinate the immune response, signaling the other cells in the immune system to perform their special functions. The number of CD4 cells in a sample of blood is an indicator of the health of the immune system.

VIRAL LOAD

The amount of HIV (RNA) in a blood sample, reported as (the) number of HIV (RNA) copies per milliliter of blood plasma. The Viral Load provides information about the number of cells infected with HIV and is an important indicator of HIV progression and how well treatment is working.

<http://aids.gov//basic/glossary/index.html>