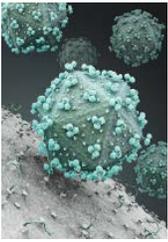


## What is HIV? - HIV/AIDS 101, part 1



**HIV** stands for **h**uman **i**mmunodeficiency **v**irus. It is the virus that can lead to acquired immunodeficiency syndrome or AIDS.

Unlike the flu, the human body can't get rid of HIV completely, even with treatment. So once you get HIV, you have it for life.

HIV attacks the body's immune system. It mainly attacks CD4 cells, also called T-cells or T-helper cells, which help the immune system fight off infections. Untreated, HIV reduces the number of CD4 cells in the body.

This makes you more likely to get other infections or infection-related cancers. Over time, HIV can destroy so many of these CD4 cells that you can't fight off infections.

These infections are called opportunistic infections, or OIs, because they take the opportunity to cause infection in someone with a very weak immune system. OIs are one of the signs that the person has AIDS, the last stage of HIV infection.



No effective cure currently exists, but with proper medical care, HIV can be controlled. The medicine used to treat HIV is called antiretroviral therapy or ART. If taken the correct way, every day, ART can greatly prolong the lives of many people infected with HIV. It keeps them healthy, and greatly lowers their chance of infecting others.

Before the introduction of ART in the mid-1990s, people with HIV could progress to AIDS in just a few years. Today, someone diagnosed with HIV and treated before the disease is far advanced can live nearly as long as someone who does not have HIV.

Be sure to get answers to any questions you have about HIV/AIDS. Your public health department, health care provider, and public library can help.



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