



Frequently Asked Questions

ACQUIRED IMMUNODEFICIENCY SYNDROME (AIDS)

What is ACQUIRED IMMUNODEFICIENCY SYNDROME (AIDS)?

AIDS stands for Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome. The term AIDS refers to an advanced stage of HIV infection. People are said to have AIDS when they have certain signs or symptoms specified in guidelines formulated by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

What causes AIDS?

AIDS is caused by HIV (human immunodeficiency virus). By killing or damaging cells of the body's immune system, HIV progressively destroys the body's ability to fight infections and certain cancers.

What are the signs and symptoms of AIDS?

Symptoms of opportunistic infections common in people with AIDS include:

- Coughing and shortness of breath;
- Seizures and lack of coordination;
- Difficult or painful swallowing;
- Mental symptoms such as confusion and forgetfulness;
- Severe and persistent diarrhea;
- Fever;
- Vision loss;
- Nausea, abdominal cramps, and vomiting;
- Weight loss and extreme fatigue;
- Severe headaches; and
- Coma.

How is AIDS diagnosed?

A diagnosis of AIDS is made by a physician using laboratory test results and clinical criteria such as AIDS indicator illnesses.



Frequently Asked Questions

How is AIDS treated?

Drugs approved for the treatment of HIV/AIDS fall into four classes:

Nucleoside or nucleotide reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NRTIs). NRTIs work by blocking the enzyme reverse transcriptase, which helps the virus make DNA from its RNA.

Nonnucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors (NNRTIs). NNRTIs work like the ones listed above.

Protease inhibitors. Protease inhibitors work completely differently from those listed above. HIV produces an enzyme called protease (pronounced PRO-tee-ace) in the last stages of its reproduction. The job of protease is to cut a large viral protein into usable units as HIV moves out of the cells. When this protein is blocked, the virus cannot be assembled properly. Protease inhibitors work by blocking the action of protease, so that new viruses are incomplete and cannot reproduce.

Fusion inhibitors. Fusion inhibitors work by blocking the entry of the virus into human cells.

For more information:

For additional information on AIDS, call the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at 1-800-232-4636, TTY: 1-888-232-6348 in English and Spanish.