



plain and simple facts

HEALTH CONCERNS



CMV Retinitis

What is CMV retinitis?

- CMV retinitis is a serious eye infection that can cause blindness. It is caused by a virus called CMV (cytomegalovirus).
- HIV positive people with CD4+ counts below 50 are at increased risk of developing this condition.

How does one get CMV?

- CMV is a very common germ. Most people have been exposed to it at some time in their lives. Usually it does not cause disease in people with healthy immune systems.
- In people with very weak immune systems (such as people with organ transplants, on chemotherapy for cancer, or with AIDS), CMV can cause serious illness.

What are the symptoms of CMV?

- CMV can infect different parts of the body, including your eyes, lungs, stomach, bowels and brain. The symptoms can vary, but the most common place in the body that CMV infects is the eyes.
- With CMV retinitis, the retina of the eye is infected by CMV. The symptoms can include blurred vision, blind spots and “floaters” (dark patches that seem to move around in your eyes’ visual fields). It is usually not painful, but it can get worse quickly and can eventually cause blindness. It is very important to report any changes in your vision to your doctor right away so you can start treatment early.

How can I prevent CMV retinitis?

- Since CMV usually only affects people with a very weak immune system (CD4+ count below 50), the best way to prevent it is to stay healthy and keep your CD4+ cells at a higher level.
- HIV medications can help you maintain the health of your immune system and keep your CD4+ count high.
- Regular checkups with your family doctor or an eye specialist can help discover CMV retinitis early.

How can CMV retinitis be treated?

- Treatments for CMV retinitis are usually given either by injection of the medication through a vein (IV) or directly into the infected eye(s).
- The medications used to treat CMV include:
 - ~ ganciclovir (Cytovene) and valganciclovir (Valcyte)

- ~ foscarnet (Foscavir)
- ~ cidofovir
- The medications do not kill the CMV virus, but they slow down the spread of CMV in your body. Treatments usually need to be taken for life. With the intravenous medications, people will usually get a permanent intravenous line in their body so they can get them medication every day. Sometimes people can take the oral form of ganciclovir or valganciclovir tablets for maintenance therapy after the infection stabilizes.
- With the recent advance in HIV treatments, some people have major improvements in their CD4+ counts and their general health and may be able to stop taking treatments for CMV at some point. Talk with your doctor about this possibility.

Decisions about particular medical treatments should always be made in consultation with a qualified medical practitioner knowledgeable about HIV-related illness and the treatments in question.



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Funding has been provided by the Public Health Agency of Canada.