



plain and simple facts

DRUG INFORMATION



HIV Viral Load

What is viral load?

- The HIV viral load test measures the amount of HIV virus in your blood. Actually, it does not count the virus itself, but measures the materials from the virus that get released into your blood when the virus reproduces.
- If you are HIV positive, you have the HIV virus in your blood.
- When your viral load is low, you would feel healthier. When your viral load is high, you may feel sicker.

What does an HIV viral load report look like?

- The number in the HIV viral load test report tells you how many HIV viruses you have in each millilitre (ml or cubic centimetre) of your blood.
- The range of the current HIV viral load test measures the number of HIV viruses between 50 to 500,000 in each ml of blood. If there are less than 50 HIV viruses in each ml of blood, the report will say that your viral load is “undetectable.”
- An undetectable HIV viral load does **not** mean there is no virus in your blood. It also does **not** mean you are cured of HIV.
- Even if your HIV viral load is “o”, it still does **not** mean you are cured of HIV, because there are other HIV viruses in your body in places you cannot measure that are separate from your blood (for example, in your lymphatic system, organs, etc.).

What can I do to decrease my viral load?

- HIV medications can help reduce the activity of the HIV virus and, therefore, decrease your viral load.
- If your viral load is over 50,000, you should discuss HIV treatment options with your physician.

What does the HIV viral load tell me about my health?

- The HIV viral load measures how actively the HIV virus is reproducing in your body. The higher the viral load, the more viral reproduction is taking place, and the more active your disease is.
- If you are taking HIV medications and the medications are effective, then your viral load should become lower. Therefore, the HIV viral load can tell you if the medications you are taking are doing their job in controlling the virus. If you have been taking the same HIV medications for a long time and your viral load remains detectable, it may mean that the medications are not working and you should discuss with your physician trying different drugs that may work better.

Canadian AIDS Treatment
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What is the difference between CD4+ (T4) cell count and viral load?

- The CD4+ (T4) cell count and viral load are blood tests that give you information about your health and how the HIV virus has affected your body, but they tell you different things.
- The CD4+ count tells you how healthy your body's immune system is. It tells you how much damage the HIV virus has done to your immune system. It can help warn you about risks of getting other diseases.
- The viral load tells you how active the HIV virus is in your body. It tells you how fast the virus is reproducing itself. It can also give you information about whether your HIV medications are working.

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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This information is also available in French, Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Swahili, and other languages at languages.catie.ca and www.acas.org

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