HIV INFECTION AND AIDS

Description

HIV stands for *human immunodeficiency virus,* the virus responsible for acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). The virus attacks T-cell lymphocytes, the cells responsible for maintaining a strong immune system. Months to years after infection, enough T cells are destroyed to weaken the body's ability to fight off serious infections and cancers. Infections normally destroyed by a healthy immune system take advantage of the body's weakened state and use that opportunity to cause illness. These are appropriately called "opportunistic infections." AIDS is a condition in which the body is overwhelmed with opportunistic infections or tumors or in which enough T-cell lymphocytes have been destroyed that a diagnosis can be made.

Risk Factors

- Direct contact with blood or other body fluids
- Unprotected sexual intercourse
- Sharing of contaminated needles
- Blood transfusions
- In pregnant women with HIV, spread to their babies during pregnancy and through breast milk

Symptoms

- No symptoms
- Flulike symptoms
- Repeated severe yeast infections in mouth or vagina despite treatment
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Muscle pain
- Joint pain
- Persistent diarrhea
- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Frequent opportunistic diseases:
  - Kaposi's sarcoma
  - Pneumocystis carinii pneumonia (PCP)
  - Tuberculosis
  - Meningitis
  - Herpes simplex infections
- Blurry vision
- Loss of vision

Prevention

- Know the sexual history of any new sexual partner.
- Have safe sex with barrier protection.
- Avoid having multiple partners.
- Avoid direct contact with blood or other body fluids by using gloves, goggles, and masks when you might encounter them.
- Avoid sharing of contaminated needles.

General Treatment Considerations

The goal of treatment is to depress the amount of virus in your body (called the viral load) to undetectable levels. Your doctor will do periodic laboratory tests to check for the viral load and to assess your immune cells (CD4). Different classes of antiviral medications may be used to suppress the virus, but there is currently no cure for HIV. Other treatments include preventative care for other diseases, such as *Pneumocystis carinii* pneumonia, tuberculosis, toxoplasmosis, tetanus, hepatitis B, pneumococcal infections, and influenza. Opportunistic infections are treated as they develop.

Notes: (Up to 4400 characters only)

Notes and suggestions