

HIV Seroconversion Illness

HIV seroconversion is the name given to a group of symptoms that can occur when someone first gets the virus. During this time, there are very high levels of HIV in the body. This is known as a high viral load. When a person has a high viral load, they can easily pass HIV to others. Standard HIV antibody tests do not detect the virus in new infections, so a person may unknowingly pass HIV at this time.

Causes

When a person gets HIV, the virus makes copies in white blood cells, called CD4 lymphocytes. The immune system responds with HIV antigens and the body begins to make antibodies to HIV. This immune response causes the symptoms of the seroconversion illness.

Symptoms

The symptoms that occur during HIV seroconversion are common to many kinds of illnesses, including the flu.

During the early stage of new HIV infection, up to 90% of people will experience flu-like symptoms. This usually happens about two to four weeks after they come in contact with HIV. The symptoms may last for one or two weeks and include:

- Fever
- Rash
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Feeling tired
- Joint or muscle pain

There are other less common symptoms including: loss of appetite, weight loss, headache, stiff neck, mouth ulcers, thrush, sore throat, nausea/vomiting, diarrhea and abdominal pain.

If you are worried about symptoms that might be HIV seroconversion, or about changes in your health, it is important to see a health care provider for testing and diagnosis.

Tests & Diagnosis

The only way to know for sure if you have HIV is to get a blood test. Tests either look for antibodies or a small amount of the HIV itself.

Treatment

For information about treatment, talk with your health care provider. There is a lot of information and support available for people who are diagnosed with HIV. For more about HIV, see HIV and AIDS and visit the links to other websites.