

TRANSCRIPTION – WHEN HIV BECOMES AIDS

This year in the United States, 42,000 people will become infected with the virus that causes AIDS. AIDS is an incurable disease that is the end result of infection by the human immunodeficiency virus, or HIV. An individual who contracts HIV may become sick quickly - or can live symptom-free for years. HIV and AIDS are not one and the same. Those with AIDS are infected with HIV, but people infected with HIV do not necessarily have AIDS. A person has AIDS when their T-cell count falls below a measurement scale of 200, as opposed to the 500 to 1,500 in a healthy person. An extremely low CD4 count means that a person's immune system is no longer healthy enough to fight off intruding viruses and bacteria. Signs that HIV may be turning into AIDS include: extreme fatigue, rapid weight loss, persistent diarrhoea, a high fever, and swollen glands in the neck, armpits, or groin. Even if a person doesn't have a low CD4 count, they are still classified as having AIDS if they contract any one of 26 opportunistic conditions. These are a group of illnesses that don't generally occur in people with functioning immune systems, but do show up in AIDS patients. Two of these are cancers. One, Kaposi's sarcoma, results from a tumor in the blood vessel walls, and appears as disfiguring pink or purple lesions on the skin and mouth. The other cancer, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, originates in the disease-fighting blood cells known as lymphocytes. This appears as swelling of the lymph nodes. Several opportunistic conditions that confirm an AIDS diagnosis stem from invading bacteria, like tuberculosis and recurrent bacterial pneumonia. Pneumocystis carinii pneumonia is a potentially deadly inflammation of the lungs that is one of the most common infections occurring in people with HIV worldwide. Tuberculosis is the leading opportunistic infection in nations where access to medications is low. It occurs when bacteria infect the lungs and can manifest as coughing with bloody mucus. Sometimes, an opportunistic infection can be fungal, like candidiasis. When candidiasis causes a white coating to form on the mouth, tongue, or vagina, this is called thrush. Although HIV itself is a virus, another virus can enter the body and cause an opportunistic infection. One example is cytomegalovirus, or CMV, a herpes virus that healthy adults fight easily. In people with HIV, however, the virus causes damages to the body, most notably the eyes. If untreated, CMV can lead to blindness. Other complications that lead to an AIDS diagnosis include wasting syndrome, whereby a person loses at least 10 percent of their body weight, and AIDS dementia complex, where nerve cell damage causes diminished mental functioning. These conditions, and others, mean that HIV has progressed to AIDS. While this is disheartening, many modern medications can keep AIDS infections from progressing indefinitely. If you have HIV, talk to your doctor about diseases that can occur following infection and the best ways to treat them. Want to learn more? Check out other videos and sources on this site for more information.