

HIV measurement is questioned

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Preliminary U.S. research indicates the HIV RNA level in untreated HIV-infected patients has little value in predicting the rate of CD4 cell count decrease.

Researchers say that potentially limits HIV RNA's clinical value concerning the decision of when to begin antiretroviral therapy.

Until the new study was completed, the degree to which HIV blood levels could predict the rate of CD4 cell loss was unclear.

To address the question, Dr. Benigno Rodríguez of Case Western Reserve University and colleagues conducted a study to estimate the extent to which presenting blood levels of HIV can account for the rate at which CD4 cells are depleted among an untreated HIV-infected population of patients.

The researchers found only a small proportion of the rate at which CD4 cells are lost could be explained by plasma HIV RNA level, suggesting more than 90 percent of the determinants of CD4 cell decline are not reflected in the amount of virus in blood.

The research appears in the current issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association.

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