

FACTSHEET #4: Testing and monitoring when you live with HIV

YOUR KEY MESSAGE:

“You can take control of your HIV health by checking your HIV blood results on a regular basis. Whether you’re taking HIV treatment or not, monitoring your blood results is the best way to keep well and healthy over the long term.”

PROCESS: VL LOW/ CD4 HIGH

In a red pen, draw a line from one corner of the whiteboard diagonally to the other. In a blue pen, draw a line from the opposite end of the whiteboard diagonally to the other. Use this diagram to explain test results with the red line representing HIV viral load and the blue line representing CD4 count. Final statement should be: “You want your viral load to go down and your CD4 count to go up.”

KNOW YOUR TESTS

You need to have blood tests every three-six months to monitor the health of your immune function and the progress of HIV in your body. There are two important tests that you need:

The CD4 test tells you how strong your immune system is. A nurse draws blood and counts the number of CD4 cells in the vial of blood taken. A low CD4 result indicates that HIV is progressing in your body. A high CD4 cell result indicates that HIV has not progressed or damaged your immune system. A high CD4 test result is better.

The HIV viral load test tells you how strong the virus is in your body. A nurse draws blood and counts the number of viral particles in the vial of blood taken. A high viral load result indicates that HIV is very active in your body. A low viral load result indicates that HIV is not so active in your body. A low viral load result is better.

GAME: WHAT’S YOUR CD4 RESULT?

Ask participants who have had a CD4 test and received the result to tell you the number of their CD4 result. Chart their results on a continuum (See Diagram Aid on next page). Explain the implications of participant CD4 results.

If your CD4 test result is 200 or below then your doctor should immediately advise you to take preventative treatment for what is called ‘opportunistic infections’. You will usually start preventative treatment first and then, once stable on that treatment, your doctor will advise you to start HIV antiretroviral treatment.

If your CD4 test result is 350 or below then your doctor should immediately advise you to take antiretroviral treatment.

If your CD4 result is 500 or above then it’s simply important to keep monitoring and take the advice of your doctor. However, when treatment is made available for people with CD4 results above 500 you should start treatment, of course always on the advice of your doctor.

KINDS OF HIV TREATMENT

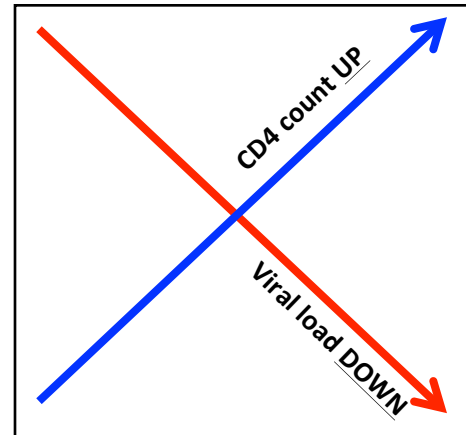
Preventative Treatment – Preventative treatments are drugs that stop you getting serious illnesses related to HIV. If your CD4 test result is low and your viral load test result is high then your doctor may recommend that you start taking some preventative treatment.

Antiretroviral treatment – Antiretroviral (ARV) treatments are drugs that lower your HIV viral load and increase your CD4 cells. If your CD4 test result is low and your HIV viral load is high then your doctor may recommend you start taking ARV treatment to prevent progressing to AIDS.

DIAGRAM AID #4: Testing and Monitoring

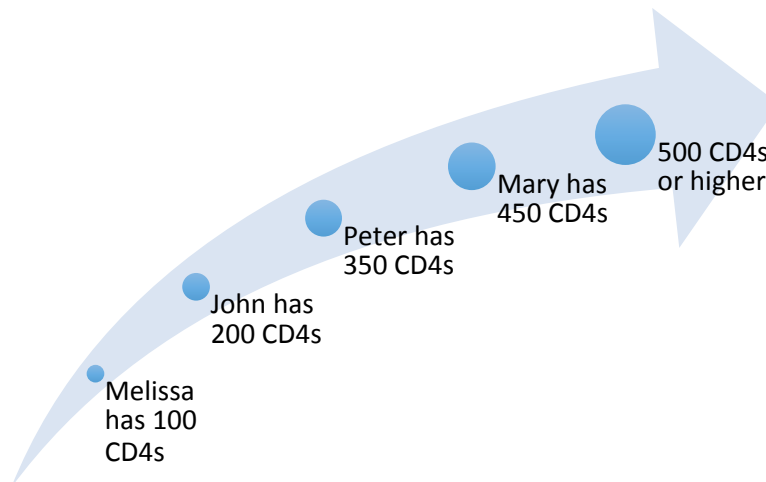
PROCESS: VL DOWN/CD4 UP

In a red pen, draw a line from one corner of the whiteboard diagonally to the other. In a blue pen, draw a line from the opposite end of the whiteboard diagonally to the other. Use this diagram to explain test results with the red line representing HIV viral load and the blue line representing CD4 count. Final statement should be: “You want your HIV viral load to go down and you want your CD4 count to go up.”



GAME: WHAT’S YOUR CD4 RESULT?

Ask participants who have had a CD4 test and received the result to tell you the number of their CD4 result. Chart their results on a continuum (See Diagram Aid below). Explain the implications of participant CD4 results.



100 CD4s or lower	200 CD4s or lower	350 CD4s or lower	499 CD4s or lower	500 CD4 or higher
Significant damage to your immune system. Preventative and ARV treatment urgently required.	Significant damage to your immune system. Both preventative and antiretroviral treatment immediately required.	Damage to your immune system. Only antiretroviral treatment is needed unless you have symptoms indicating an opportunistic infection.	May indicate early damage to your immune system. Swollen lymph glands, night sweats, fungal infections such as candida (thrush), athlete’s foot and tinea are common.	Usually no symptoms present. Monitor and take the advice of your doctor.