

What does having an undetectable viral load, mean?

This means that HIV can't be seen in your blood sample. It means your treatment is working very well for you. However, **it does not mean that HIV is cured** or that there is no virus in your body. The virus is still there but it is **"hiding"**. If you stop taking your ARVs, or if your ARVs stop working, the virus will multiply and the viral load will become high.

When going to the clinic, you will be tested for **viral load, weight, height, and your general wellbeing** will be checked. You may also have tests to see how your **liver and kidneys** are working, and your immune status (**CD4**) may be checked. All of these tests help the health care workers to know how well you are doing on ART. Although viral load is thought to be the best way to measure how well the HIV virus is controlled, the other tests are also important. Weight and height tell the clinic if you are growing well. Other tests indicate if there are any infections or side effects on ART. Liver and kidney tests help them to know if your body is being affected by the medicines.



If the viral load is high, it means that the treatment is not as effective anymore. A person with high viral load can have a high CD4 count and be very healthy, but in time the virus will harm the immune system and cause the person to get sick.



Did You Know

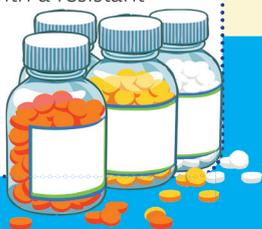
If there are lots of strong CD4 cells, or warriors, in the body, the immune system is said to be strong! This means that the body can fight off infections. But if the CD4 count is low (for example, less than 200), the immune system does not have enough warriors to fight off infections. Very low CD4 counts (less than 50) need urgent attention as they can be very sick without showing signs of it.

HIGH VIRAL LOAD???

This usually means that:

1. The client is not consistently taking his/her medication every day OR
2. The client's HIV virus has developed resistance to the ARVs OR
3. The client may have been infected with a resistant virus.

The best way to avoid a high viral load is adhere to your medication every day and to avoid becoming re-infected with a resistant virus. That means ensuring your partner is tested and if HIV positive, is also on ART and adhering well.



Remember

Life long adherence to ART can be hard. There may be many reasons why your client faces challenges with adherence. It is so important that your clients feel able to share their problems with you without feeling judged, that you listen and assist them to get the support they need, so that they may be helped to adhere well.

ART Monitoring

As poor adherence is the most common reason for the viral load to be high, your client needs to go through three months of intense adherence support, to ensure that adherence issues have been addressed.

At the end of the three-month period, your client should be re-bled for viral load. If the viral load is still high, the clinic staff will discuss switching to second line drugs.



The major reason for HIV to develop resistance is poor adherence. If the client is not taking his/her medicines every day or is defaulting, the ARVs may stop working. If your clients are drinking a lot of alcohol, they may forget to take their ARVs, which can cause resistance.

