



**MODULE 2**

FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

**STUDY GUIDE**

**HIV/AIDS: 101**

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# STAGES OF INFECTION

## STAGE 1: ACUTE INFECTION

**What's happening:** Large amounts of HIV are produced in the body. The virus uses important immune system cells called CD4 cells to make copies of itself. In the process, it destroys the CD4 cells, causing a body's CD4 count to fall quickly. Eventually, the immune response will bring the amount of virus in the body back to a stable level. At this point, the CD4 count will then begin to increase, but it may not return to pre-infection levels.

**Symptoms:** Within 2 to 4 weeks after infection with HIV, you may feel sick with flu-like symptoms. Other symptoms may include night sweats, muscle aches, sore throat, fatigue, or rash. This is called acute retroviral syndrome (ARS) or primary HIV infection, and it's the body's natural response to the HIV infection. (Not everyone develops ARS, however—and some people may have no symptoms.)

Your ability to spread HIV is highest during this stage because the amount of virus in the blood is very high.

## STAGE 2: CLINICAL LATENCY (INACTIVITY OR DORMANCY)

**What's happening:** During this phase, HIV is still active, but reproduces at very low levels. Toward the middle and end of this period, your viral load begins to rise and your CD4 cell count begins to drop. As this happens, you may begin to have symptoms of HIV infection as your immune system becomes too weak to protect you.

**Symptoms:** This period is sometimes called asymptomatic HIV infection or chronic HIV infection. You may not have any symptoms or get sick during this time. People who are on antiretroviral therapy (ART) may live with clinical latency for several decades. For people who are not on ART, this period can last up to a decade, but some may progress through this phase faster. It's important to remember that you're still able to transmit HIV to others, even if you're treated with ART, although ART greatly reduces the risk.

## STAGE 3: HIV SYMPTOMATIC/AIDS

**What's happening:** This is the stage of infection that occurs when your immune system is badly damaged and you become vulnerable to infections and infection-related cancers called opportunistic illnesses.

**Symptoms:** More than 25 opportunistic infections and conditions are associated with AIDS. Proper treatment may prevent many of these infections; however, infections can happen at any time. Opportunistic Infections can include:

- Candidiasis (yeast)
- Invasive Cervical Carcinoma
- Cytomegalovirus (CMV)
- Chronic Herpes
- Kaposi's Sarcoma
- Tuberculosis
- PCP (pneumocystis carinii pneumonia)
- Wasting syndrome

## STAGE 4: AIDS

**What's happening:** When the number of your CD4 cells falls below 200 cells per cubic millimeter of blood (200 cells/mm<sup>3</sup>), you are considered to have progressed to AIDS (normal CD4 counts are between 500 and 1,600 cells/mm<sup>3</sup>). You can also be diagnosed with AIDS if you develop one or more opportunistic illnesses, regardless of your CD4 count.

Without treatment, people who are diagnosed with AIDS typically survive about 3 years. Once someone has a dangerous opportunistic illness, life expectancy without treatment falls to about 1 year. People with AIDS need medical treatment to prevent death.