



Monitoring Tests

HIV Viral Load

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What is Viral Load?

- The HIV viral load test measures the amount of HIV virus in your blood. Actually it does not count the virus itself, but measures the materials from the virus that get released into your blood when the virus reproduces.
- If you are HIV positive, you have the HIV virus in your blood.
- When the viral load is low, you would feel healthier. When the viral load is high, you may feel sicker.

What does a HIV viral load report look like?

- The number in the HIV viral load test report tells you how many HIV viruses you have in each c.c. of your blood.
- The range of the current HIV viral load test measures the number of HIV viruses between 50 to 500,000 in each c.c. of blood. If there are less than 50 HIV viruses in each c.c. of blood, the report will say it is “Undetectable”.
- An undetectable HIV viral load does not mean there is no virus in your blood. It also does not mean you are cured of HIV.
- Even if your HIV viral load is 0, it still does not mean you are cured of HIV, because there are other HIV virus in your body in places you cannot measure, separate from your blood. (for example, your lymphatic system, your organs etc.)

What can I do to decrease my viral load?

- HIV medications can help reduce the activity of the HIV virus and therefore decrease your viral load.
- If your viral load is over 50,000, you should discuss HIV treatment options with your physician.

What does the HIV Viral Load tell me about my health?

- The HIV Viral Load measures how active the HIV virus is reproducing in your body. The higher the viral load, the more viral reproduction is taking place, and the more active is your disease.
- If you are taking HIV medications and the medications are effective, then your viral load should become lower. Therefore, the HIV viral load can tell you if the medications you are taking are doing their job in controlling the HIV virus. If you have been taking the same medications for HIV for a long time and your viral load remains detectable, it may mean that the medications are not working and you should discuss with your physician about trying different drugs that may work better.



What is the difference between T4 (CD4) count and Viral Load?

- The T4 Count and Viral load are both blood tests that give you information about your health and how the HIV virus has affected your body, but they tell you different things.
- The T4 (CD4) count tells you how healthy your body's immune system is. It tells you how much damage the HIV virus have done to your immune system. It can warn you about risks of getting other diseases.
- The Viral load tells you how active the HIV virus is in your body. It tells you how fast the virus is reproducing itself. It can also give you information about whether your HIV medications are working.

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