New Test for HIV Itself

June 1, 1995

The procedure most people call “HIV testing” doesn’t actually look for the virus in blood or saliva. Instead, the tests in common usage today detect the antibodies which the immune system produces in response to the presence of HIV. Now, according to Reuters, Belgian researchers have developed a new test which checks specifically for HIV. Testing for the virus itself overcomes the major drawbacks of the HIV anti-body tests: It takes time to develop antibodies. “Usually you have to wait about three months after exposure before knowing whether you are HIV positive,” says Professor Jose Remacle of Namur University in Belgium, a develop of the new test. “We can detect the virus a day or so later.” Use of the new test virtually eliminates the so-called “window period” of time between possible exposure to HIV and when it can be determined if HIV infection has actually occurred. The test is being marketed in laboratories in France, Italy and Belgium at $10 per kit and the makers are hoping to distribute it elsewhere in Europe and in the U.S. as well.

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