Twice Bitten

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Just because they already have a virus as big as the Ritz doesn't mean that HIVers aren't eligible for other infections. They are. But who would be crazy enough to become a petri dish for other bugs? Well, contrary to the conventional wisdom that other infections speed up HIV progression, two recent studies found two very different infections -- scrub typhus and hepatitis G -- that seemed to slow it down. We kid you not.

In a study from India reported in *The Lancet* last year, 10 HIVers with scrub typhus -- a type of mite-carried bacteria found in southern Asia -- were compared to HIVers who had a range of other infections. In the HIV/typhus patients, two saw their viral load fall below detectability, while two others saw a significant drop; the control group saw no such effect. The bacteria also actively suppressed HIV in the test tube.

In a September *New England Journal of Medicine* article, researchers reported discovering a new hepatitis virus, christened G, or HGV. Hepatitis is liver inflammation that can be caused by hep A, B or C viruses, alcohol abuse, certain infections, even anti-HIV meds. The good news about HGV is that so far it doesn't appear to cause disease. Further, data from two studies showed that HGV/HIV co infectees had a lower HIV load than those who only had HIV. Indeed, the more HGV there was in the blood, the lower the HIV count. People with both viruses also had a lower risk of death.

Now, don't even think about it! These findings shouldn't encourage anyone to rush out to acquire another disease in order to fight AIDS. But further study of these two particular bugs' anti-HIV effect may herald new ways to prime the body to control, even conquer, HIV.

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