12-Year Remission in French Teen

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An 18-year-old French woman has been in a state of what researchers call viral remission for the 12 years since she stopped antiretroviral (ARV) treatment. This is the first example of such long-term remission in someone who was born with HIV.

She was initially given Retrovir (zidovudine, AZT) as a prophylaxis to keep the virus from taking hold; when tests later showed she still had a high viral load, she was switched to full-scale, four-drug ARV treatment.

When the girl was 6 years old, she and her mother dropped out of care for a year. Upon their return, the mother said she'd stopped giving her daughter ARVs. Because clinicians couldn't detect the virus in the child's system, they kept her off treatment.
The girl's viral load blipped up slightly once when she was 11, and then resolved naturally. Her viral load has otherwise remained undetectable throughout the past 12 years, at least according to standard tests. Highly sensitive assays can still find extremely low levels of virus.

"Whether immediate treatment upon infection eventually will lead to eradication, as suggested in this case, remains a hypothesis to be tested in controlled trials," says Jens D. Lundgren, MD, a professor of viral diseases at the University of Copenhagen in Denmark. "We know that [ARV treatment] is not eradicative when used later on in the course of HIV infection, but perhaps a less-impaired immune system will do the trick in some patients? If so, this will also be informative to guide vaccine development efforts."

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