Herpes Linked to HIV in Semen of Gay Men on ARVs

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About 10 percent of gay men taking antiretrovirals (ARVs) still experience low-level HIV replication in their semen, and this HIV presence is associated with the shedding of herpes viruses, aidsmap reports. Reporting their findings in Clinical Infectious Diseases, researchers studied 114 HIV-positive gay men taking ARVs who each had a viral load of less than 500 in their blood plasma; 88 percent of the group had a viral load less than 50, which is considered undetectable. The investigators studied the relationship between shedding in semen of seven different herpes viruses—including cytomegalovirus (CMV) and Epstein-Barr virus (EBV)—and HIV shedding in semen.

Eleven participants (9.6 percent) had detectable levels of HIV in their semen, while 72 (63.2 percent) had one ore more detectable herpes virus in their semen. A total of 49 percent of the group had detectable CMV in their semen, and 31 percent had detectable EBV. Those with viral loads between 50 and 500 were more likely to have detectable levels of HIV in their semen.

High-level CMV shedding in semen was linked to HIV shedding in the genital tract. Among those with detectable HIV in their semen, 64 percent had high-level CMV shedding. By comparison, only 24 percent of those participants with undetectable HIV in their semen had high-level CMV shedding. Meanwhile, 73 percent of those with detectable HIV in their semen had high-level EBV shedding, compared with 26 percent of those with undetectable genital HIV.

To read the aidsmap story, click here.

To read the abstract, click here.

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