



Is HIV Now Named “Lentivirus Humimdef1”?

Yes. But you can still call it HIV, explains the International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses about its updated naming system.

January 10, 2025 By [Trent Straube](#)

We all know that [HIV](#) stands for human immunodeficiency virus, which over time can cause acquired immunodeficiency syndrome, or [AIDS](#). So what the heck is Lentivirus humimdef1?

Lentivirus humimdef1 is the proper taxonomic classification for common HIV, according to an updated naming system devised by the [International Committee on Taxonomy of Viruses](#), or ICTV. (Taxonomy is the study of naming organisms.) The change was approved in 2020 but began drawing more attention last month when the National Center for Biotechnology Information (NCBI) announced it would be adding about 3,000 new Latinized names to its database in the coming months, according to Science magazine.

The article’s headline—[“‘Silly and Pompous’: Official New Names for Viruses Rile Up Researchers”](#)—nods to the head-scratching, even dismissive, attitude of several experts regarding the new names.

“Longer Latin names which bear no resemblance to what we currently use for these pathogens just seem to be distractors that serve no one other than the taxonomists who dream them up,” Boghuma Titanji, MD, a physician-scientist at Emory University, told Science. The revised names gave her “a much-needed laugh,” she said, adding that “referring to HIV as Lentivirus humimdef1 is not something I will be doing anytime soon—or ever.”

ICTV president Murilo Zerbini explained that the naming system needed an overhaul because modern scientific techniques, including those involved with DNA and genes, can identify thousands of viruses in a single study. A standardized classification system was needed for viruses, and the two-part Linnaean system was accepted.

Under this system, SARS-CoV-2, for “severe acute respiratory syndrome-related coronavirus 2,” better known as the virus that causes COVID-19, is now Betacoronavirus pandemicum.

Sounds like something Harry Potter would utter while waving his wand. Hence, much of the

sneering tone of the story.

In response to the article, members of the executive committee of the ICTV wrote to the publication to officially “correct the message advanced in this article,” stating:

“Names such as human immunodeficiency virus type 1 (HIV-1), dengue virus (DENV) and West Nile virus (WNV) have been used for decades, and scientists can keep using them. But these species also have taxonomic names: *Lentivirus humimdef1*, *Orthoflavivirus denguei* and *Orthoflavivirus nilense* respectively.

“This is no different from the naming of animals, plants and fungi. Biologists may report on Atlantic salmon (*Salmo salar*), wheat (*Triticum aestivum*) or the death cap mushroom (*Amanita phalloides*), using the common name but adding its taxonomic classification to ensure clarity of reference. Virologists could similarly write that ‘the incidence of infections with HIV-1 (*Lentivirus humimdef1*) has declined,’ and refer to the virus as HIV-1 throughout the rest of the article.

“The [ICTV website](#) provides several tools that make linking past taxon names to current names straightforward. The [taxonomy browser](#) includes links to the complete history of every taxon that includes all changes to a taxon’s name. An additional tool, ‘[Find the Species](#),’ enables a user to enter all or part of a virus’ name and find the new, current species name. How to use virus names is amply explained in many outputs from the ICTV and in the [published literature](#).

“The ICTV introduced the use of binomial names for viruses to help clarify their place in the taxonomy, using a format that has been used throughout the rest of biology since Linnaeus introduced them in 1753. There should be no place for confusion.”

If you need a refresher in taxonomy, scientists divide all living things into a hierarchy of categories arranged from the general (realms, kingdoms) to the specific (families, genera). Most scientists agree that all organisms can be divided into five to seven kingdoms (including animals, plants, fungi, protista, prokaryotes and chromalveolata). Kingdoms are divided into phyla, which are then divided into classes, orders, families, genera (or genuses) and species.

Viruses, however, are in a world all their own. They replicate in a living host cell and are not considered to be living organisms; as such, they are named and categorized by the ICTV in a manner similar to the taxonomy of living things. [Here is how HIV-1 fits into these categories](#) according to the ICTV website:

Realm — Riboviria

Kingdom — Pararnavirae

Phylum — Artverviricota

Class — Revtraviricetes

Order Ortervirales

Family — Retroviridae

Subfamily — Orthoretrovirinae

Genus — Lentivirus

Species — Lentivirus humimdef1

In case you're wondering, there is also a *Lentivirus humimdef2*. This makes sense because we have HIV-1 as well as the lesser-talked-about HIV-2, which is not as infectious and is mostly found in West Africa. (Thus, HIV is generally shorthand for HIV-1.) In other words, there are two species of *Lentivirus*, which is itself a type of retrovirus. Hence, the meds to fight HIV are called antiretrovirals.

To learn more about *Lentivirus humimdef1* and its symptoms, prevention and treatments, check out our series of [POZ Basics on HIV and AIDS](#). And don't despair: They're written in plain English.

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<http://beta.docker.poz.com/article/hiv-now-named-lentivirus-humimdef1>