New HIV Replication Pathway Discovered

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HIV is a particularly sloppy virus: It fails to integrate its genetic code into the DNA of human immune cells up to 99 percent of the time. So most often the virus is left in limbo outside the cellular DNA. Researchers have long assumed that this unintegrated virus cannot reproduce. But a controversial new study challenges such wisdom, finding that in the right conditions unintegrated virus still may have the capacity to copy itself.

David N. Levy, PhD, an associate professor at the New York University College of Dentistry who led the study, says his team's findings suggest one means by which the virus might endure even in the face of antiretroviral therapy. Future research, he says, could hone in on this replication method in order to develop tactics for viral eradication.

Levy cautions that he has thus far only conducted preliminary laboratory studies.

"And while we think that it may be likely that the virus can do this in people," he says "it certainly needs to be followed up."

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