



NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH AND MENTAL HYGIENE
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HIV-2 -- Frequently Asked Questions

What is HIV-2 and how is it different from HIV-1?

HIV-2 is a lentivirus that is in the same family as HIV-1 and Simian Immunodeficiency Virus (SIV). It is 40-60% genetically similar to HIV-1, and there is considerable antibody cross-reactivity. Standard diagnostic testing algorithms now used by all public and commercial laboratories include tests to confirm the diagnosis of HIV and distinguish between infection with HIV-1, HIV-2, or both.

Where is HIV-2 found?

HIV-2 is found predominantly in West Africa, in countries such as Senegal, Mali, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, the Gambia, Niger, Cote d'Ivoire and Liberia. It has also been found in Mozambique and Angola, in southwestern India, Brazil, and in countries with large West African immigrant populations such as France and Portugal. NYC is an immigration gateway with a growing population of persons originating in West Africa.

How is HIV-2 spread?

HIV-2 is transmitted in the same way as HIV-1 -- through sexual contact, use of contaminated injection equipment or other exposure to blood and body fluids, and from mother to child ("vertical" transmission). Sexual and vertical transmission are much less efficient in HIV-2 than HIV-1.

Does HIV-2 cause AIDS?

HIV-2 replicates and evolves more slowly than HIV-1. In 86-95% of patients followed in West Africa and Europe, it does not cause progressive disease. Patients that develop HIV-2-associated AIDS have the same signs, symptoms and opportunistic infections that are seen in patients with HIV-1 associated AIDS.

When should I suspect HIV-2?

Current laboratory tests can accurately distinguish between HIV-1 and HIV-2. However, if you are seeing a patient for the first time who was initially diagnosed prior to 2014 and has developed signs and symptoms of immunosuppression despite an undetectable viral load, suspect HIV-2, especially if the patient is from an HIV-2 endemic area. Retest the patient to confirm the HIV diagnosis and identify whether the infecting virus is HIV-1 or HIV-2.

Does conventional HIV testing include testing for HIV-2?

Yes. Testing algorithms currently used by all public and commercial laboratories include a confirmatory test that can distinguish between HIV-1 and HIV-2.