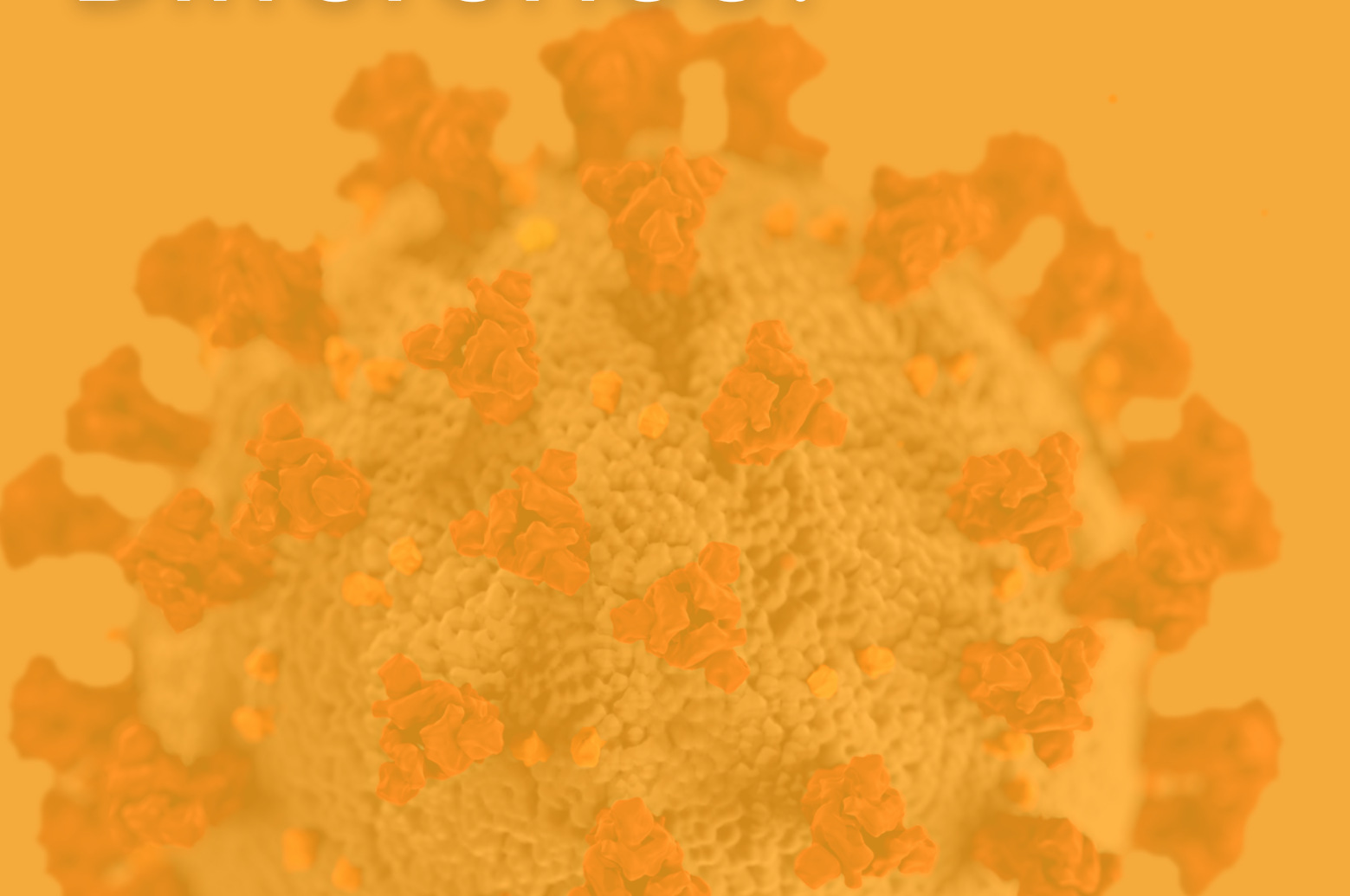


CD4 Count & Viral Load

What's the Difference?





CD4 Count & Viral Load

CD4 count and viral load are two important tests in the management of HIV. While both provide vital information about a person's health status and disease progression, they measure different aspects of the infection and thus serve distinct purposes. Understanding their importance and differences is key to effective HIV treatment and care.

CD4 Count: A Measure of Immune System Strength

CD4 cells are an important part of the immune system, playing a central role in coordinating the body's immune response to infections. HIV specifically targets and destroys these cells.

Why is the CD4 Count Important?

The CD4 count is a direct indicator of the health and strength of a person's immune system. A higher CD4 count signifies a stronger immune system, better able to fight off infections.

As HIV progresses, the CD4 count typically declines. A persistently low CD4 count indicates severe immune damage and a higher risk of developing opportunistic infections and AIDS-defining illnesses.

After ART, there is a stable or increased CD4 count, indicating immune recovery and a positive response to treatment.

Viral Load: A Measure of the virus in the body

The viral load measures the amount of HIV in the blood. Higher viral loads are generally associated with faster disease progression and a greater risk of developing opportunistic infections if left untreated.

A rising viral load in someone on ART can indicate treatment failure, often due to poor adherence, drug resistance, or suboptimal drug regimens.

A high viral load means the virus is multiplying rapidly.



CD4 Count and Viral Load Compared:

Feature	CD4 Count	Viral Load
What it measures	Number of immune cells (CD4+ T-lymphocytes)	Amount of HIV RNA (virus particles)
What it indicates	Strength of the immune system, immune damage	Level of active HIV replication, disease activity
Primary Use in ART	Guide treatment initiation (historically), monitor immune recovery	Monitor treatment effectiveness, assess transmission risk

The CD4 count provides a snapshot of the immune system's health, while the viral load offers real-time information about HIV activity and the effectiveness of treatment. CD4 and Viral Load are important because they help to assess the well-being of people living with HIV.

For more information, talk to your healthcare provider.

<https://www.thriveinfo.org>

<https://www.afrocab.org>

Through the generous support of Unitaid, the Clinton Health Access Initiative (CHAI)-led THRIVE Project is enabling access to critical prevention, screening, and treatment commodities for advanced HIV disease to dramatically reduce mortality among adults and children living with HIV. In partnership with CHAI through this project, AFROCAB is leading community and civil society engagement in collaboration with global and local stakeholders.

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