

Study Shows Medicine for HSV Affects HIV

A clinical study published in *The New England Journal of Medicine* on February 22 showed that a particular treatment for herpes simplex virus type 2 (HSV-2) helps control HIV and may be able to lower rates of transmission. The study took place in Burkina Faso among women who were HIV positive and also had HSV-2. They were taking the medicine valacyclovir (brand name "Valtrex") at a dose of 500 mg twice a day to control their HSV and were not taking strong anti-HIV medications. Results of the study showed that the number of times genital HIV was detected over a period of time was reduced for women taking valacyclovir. Because of the reduced frequency that genital HIV was detected and the reduced frequency of genital herpes ulcers, it is hoped that transmission of HIV would be reduced. However, this does not mean that HIV transmission would be eliminated. **IT DOES NOT MEAN THAT PEOPLE WITH HIV WHO TAKE THIS MEDICATION CAN HAVE UNPROTECTED SEX.** Interesting, taking this HSV-2 medication also considerably reduced plasma HIV (the amount of HIV in the blood) and this continued to reduce over time. This implies that anyone with HSV-2/HIV co-infection should consider treatment with anti-HSV medications. Many people living with HIV have the HSV-2 virus. A simple blood test is available to detect antibodies to HSV-2 to determine if people have been exposed to HSV-2 and should consider a treatment regime that includes anti-HSV medication.

~CM and John Falkenberg

Source: Nagot, N., et al. (2007). "Reduction of HIV-1 RNA Levels with Therapy to Suppress Herpes Simplex Virus." *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 356;8.