

AIDS JUST THE FACTS

You know the important roles your heart, lungs, bones and muscles play in your health. But you probably haven't thought very much about your immune system, even though it is one of the most important systems in your body.

YOUR IMMUNE SYSTEM

The job of the immune system is to protect your body from infections. You can get infected from germs when you have a cut or a wound or from viruses such as those that cause the flu or a cold. When attacked by a virus, your immune system produces a substance called an antibody to help protect itself. A different kind of antibody is produced to fight off each kind of virus.

THE AIDS VIRUS

AIDS is the most serious stage of a disease that is caused by a virus, the Human Immunodeficiency Virus, or HIV. This virus attacks the immune system itself, leaving a person unable to fight off infections. Even though the virus that causes AIDS is so tiny that it can't be seen with an ordinary microscope, it is one of the most deadly germs ever identified by scientists.

When HIV enters a person's blood stream, it damages cells called T-helper cells. In a healthy person, these cells tell the rest of the immune system that the body is being attacked by germs. The HIV, however, enters these T-helper cells and makes them unable to function. This leaves the rest of the immune system unable to fight off infections.

Even though the immune system of a person who has been infected with HIV will produce antibodies to this virus, these antibodies are unable to protect the body against HIV. This virus usually remains in a person's T-helper cells for a period of time before it begins to completely destroy the immune system. It takes a while for someone with HIV to develop AIDS. In the US on average, it takes 10 years or more before the immune system breaks down and can no longer fight off typical germs and infections. When this occurs people get sick with all kinds of diseases called opportunistic infections. A person then progresses through different stages of disease with AIDS being the most serious stage. It is hard to predict how long someone can live with HIV/AIDS, it all depends on the overall health of the individual and the treatment they have access to. It could be as few as five or as long as 25 years.

THE AIDS TEST

A test has been developed to tell whether a person has been infected with HIV, it is a blood test. This test shows the presence of antibodies to the HIV. If antibodies to the virus appear in a person's blood, that means the HIV virus is present. People who test positive have been infected and are able to pass the virus on to other people even if they don't have any symptoms of AIDS.

Name _____ Period _____ Date _____

COMPLETE THE PARAGRAPH BELOW

The paragraph below tells the story about HIV and how it can affect a person's immune system. Read each sentence carefully, filling in the missing words as you read.

AIDS is caused by a (1) _____ known as the (2) _____

_____ or (3) _____

for short. When it attacks the (4) _____, it leaves a

person unable to fight off (5) _____. The (6) _____

produced by the immune system are unable to fight off HIV. That is because this virus attacks

the (7) _____ cells and leaves them unable to function. When enough

of these cells are (8) _____, a person progresses through various

(9) _____ of the disease. The most serious and deadly stage is

called (10) _____.