

2 Is HIV the Cause of AIDS?

There is no proof that HIV causes AIDS. In fact, all the epidemiological and microbiological evidence taken together conclusively demonstrates that HIV cannot cause AIDS or any other illness. The concept that AIDS is caused by a virus is not a fact, but a belief that was introduced at a 1984 press conference by Dr. Robert Gallo, a researcher employed by the National Institutes of Health (NIH).¹⁴

HIV is a retrovirus, a type of virus studied meticulously during two decades of federal health programs that centered around the search for a cancer virus. The idea of contagious cancer was a popular notion in the 1960s and 70s. Since retroviruses have no cell-killing mechanisms, and cancer is a condition marked by rapid cell growth, this type of virus was considered a viable candidate for the cause of cancer. However, healthy people live in harmony with an uncountable number of harmless retroviruses; some are infectious while others are **endogenous**, produced by our own **DNA**.¹⁵ Few, if any, retroviruses have been shown to cause disease in humans.

In the 1980s when the CDC began to direct its attention to AIDS, Gallo and other cancer researchers switched their focus from cancer to the newly identified dilemma called AIDS, and the same government scientists who led the quest for a cancer virus began to search for a virus that could cause AIDS.

On April 23, 1984, Gallo called an international press conference in conjunction with the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). He used this forum to announce his discovery of a new retrovirus described as “the probable cause of AIDS.” Although Gallo presented no evidence to support his tentative assumption, the HHS immediately characterized it as “another miracle of American medicine...the triumph of science over a dreaded disease.”¹⁶

Later that same day, Gallo filed a patent for the antibody test now known as the “AIDS test.” By the following day, *The New York Times* had turned Gallo’s proposal into a certainty with front page news of “the virus that causes AIDS,” and all funding for research into other possible causes of AIDS came to an abrupt halt.¹⁷

By announcing his **hypothesis** to the media without providing substantiating data, Gallo violated a fundamental rule of the scientific process. Researchers must first publish evidence for a hypothesis in a medical or scientific journal, and document the research or experiments that were used to construct it. Experts then examine and debate the hypothesis, and attempt to duplicate the original experiments to confirm or refute the original findings. Any new hypothesis must stand up to the scrutiny of peer review and must be verified by successful experiments before it can be considered a reasonable theory.

Endogenous: Produced from within; originating within an organ or part.

DNA: The commonly used abbreviation for deoxyribonucleic acid, the principle carrier of genetic information in almost all organisms. DNA controls a cell’s activities by specifying and regulating the synthesis of enzymes and other proteins in the cell.

Hypothesis: An unproven assumption tentatively accepted as a basis for further investigation and argument.

In the case of HIV, Gallo announced an unconfirmed hypothesis to the media who reported his idea as if it were an established fact, inciting government officials to launch new public health policies based on the unsubstantiated notion of an AIDS virus. Some attribute these violations of the scientific process to the atmosphere of terror and desperation that surrounded the notion of an infectious epidemic.

The data Gallo used to construct his HIV/AIDS hypothesis were published several days after his announcement. Rather than supporting his hypothesis, this paper revealed that Gallo was unable to find evidence of HIV (actual virus) in more than half of the AIDS patients in his study.¹⁸ While he was able to detect antibodies in most, antibodies alone are not an indication of current infection and are actually an indication of immunity from infection.

His paper also failed to provide a credible explanation as to how a retrovirus could cause AIDS. Gallo suggested that HIV worked by destroying immune cells, but 70 years of medical research had shown that retroviruses are unable to kill cells, and he offered no proof that HIV differed from other harmless retroviruses. In fact, all evidence to date conclusively demonstrates that HIV—like all retroviruses—is not **cytotoxic**.

The focus of questions about HIV quickly shifted from how it could cause AIDS to who found the now valuable viral commodity after Dr. Luc Montagnier of the Pasteur Institute in France accused Gallo of stealing his HIV sample. A congressional investigation determined that Gallo had presented fraudulent data in his original paper on HIV, and that the virus he claimed to have discovered had been sent to him by Montagnier.¹⁹ Negotiations were conducted between the French and American governments to establish discovery and patent rights.²⁰ These ended in a compromise, with Montagnier and Gallo sharing credit as the codiscoverers of HIV and ownership rights to the HIV test. Montagnier has since stated that he does not believe HIV alone is capable of causing AIDS.²¹

Why HIV Cannot Cause AIDS²²

- HIV is a retrovirus. Retroviruses are not cytotoxic; they do not kill cells.
- HIV shares the same genetic structure as all other known retroviruses. Hundreds of retroviruses are normally found in healthy human beings.
- Even if HIV could kill T cells, it only infects on average 1 in 1,000 T cells which is not enough to deplete T cells and cause AIDS.
- Most healthy people have had infections with cell-killing viruses like those that cause herpes and mononucleosis. These viruses infect millions of T cells—up to half of all immune cells—without causing T cell depletion and without causing AIDS.

Cytotoxic: Able to kill or damage cells.

Since 1984, more than 100,000 papers have been published on HIV. None of these papers, singly or collectively, has been able to reasonably demonstrate or effectively prove that HIV causes AIDS. Although Gallo claimed that HIV caused AIDS by destroying the T cells of the immune system, 20 years of cancer research confirmed that retroviruses are not cytotoxic. In fact, there is still no evidence in the scientific literature demonstrating that HIV is able to destroy T cells, directly or indirectly.

Comparing HIV to Varicella Zoster Virus (VZV), the known cause of chicken pox, highlights some of the ways in which HIV defies rules of science and logic.

HIV Bends the Rules of Science	
VZV = Chicken Pox	HIV = AIDS?
Same symptoms in all cases	Different symptoms depending on risk group
Natural VZV antibodies, in the absence of virus, indicate life-long immunity	Natural HIV antibodies, in the absence of virus, said to indicate or predict AIDS
VZV (actual virus) is readily found in all cases of chicken pox	HIV (actual virus) is rarely found in cases of AIDS
VZV (actual virus) is readily found in high concentrations in affected tissues of ill patients	HIV (actual virus) is rarely found and only in low concentrations in T cells of ill patients
VZV replication kills cells	HIV replication does not kill cells
Most severe symptoms appear days or weeks after infection and before antibody immunity (VZV+)	AIDS symptoms said to occur years after infection and only after antibody immunity (HIV+)

HIV is the only virus that is said to cause a group of diseases caused by other viruses and bacteria rather than causing its own disease. AIDS experts also say that HIV is able to cause cell depletion—loss of immune cells—at the same time it causes cell proliferation or cancer.

Although more research money has been spent on HIV than on the combined total of all other viruses studied in medical history, there is no scientific evidence validating the hypothesis that HIV is the cause of AIDS, or that AIDS has a viral cause. A good hypothesis is defined by its ability to solve problems and mysteries, make accurate predictions and produce results. The HIV hypothesis has failed to meet any of these criteria.

Hundreds of scientists around the world are now requesting an official reevaluation of the HIV hypothesis. For more information on their efforts, refer to *The Group for the Scientific Reappraisal of the HIV/AIDS Hypothesis* on page 76.