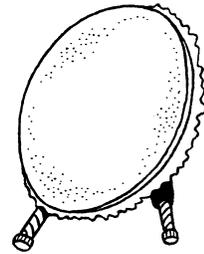


## Information for Inuit Community Members

### Fact Sheet Stages of HIV Infection



## Stages of HIV Infection

The progression of HIV can be divided into several stages as this disease gets worse gradually.

### STAGE 1: Primary HIV Infection

This stage of infection happens immediately after a person has been infected and lasts a few weeks. Often during this stage, the person will experience flu like symptoms. In a few cases, the flu-like symptoms are serious enough to consult with a doctor but the HIV diagnosis is often missed. Even if an HIV antibody test is done at this time, the test may come back negative.

During this stage, there is a large amount of HIV in the blood and the immune system begins to respond to the virus by producing HIV antibodies and cells that attack HIV.

### STAGE 2: None or Minor Symptoms

This stage usually lasts for about 10 years and the person will not experience any symptoms, except for perhaps swollen glands. The level of HIV in the blood drops to very low levels but people are still infectious during this stage. Although the levels are low, HIV antibodies are detectable in the blood so antibody tests will show a positive result.

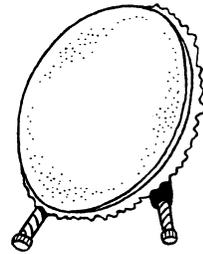
HIV is not dormant during this stage. HIV is in fact very active in the lymph nodes. Large numbers of cells called T cells are infected and die and a large amount of the virus is produced. A viral load test measures the amount of HIV that escapes the lymph nodes.

Symptoms:

- Weight loss
- Minor skin infections
- Herpes
- Recurrent colds and/or coughs

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### **STAGE 3: Symptomatic HIV Infection**

Over time, the immune system loses the struggle to contain HIV. This is because:

- a) the lymph nodes and tissues become damaged or “burnt out” because of the years of activity
- b) HIV mutates (changes) and becomes stronger and more varied which leads to destruction of more T cells
- c) The body cannot make T cells faster than they are destroyed

As the immune system fails, symptoms develop. At first, the symptoms are mild but as time goes on, the immune system deteriorates, symptoms get worse and the person will develop opportunistic infections and cancers that the immune system of a healthy person would be able to fight.

- Weight loss
- Unexplained chronic diarrhea
- Unexplained prolonged fever
- Unexpected tiredness
- Yeast infections of the mouth and throat (thrush - a fungal disease of the oral mucosa and tongue). Women may also get vaginal yeast infections that keep coming back
- Oral hairy leucoplakia (white thickening or coating of the lining of the mouth)
- Tuberculosis TB (bacterial infection in the lungs)
- Severe bacterial infections (e.g. pneumonia)

As the immune system becomes more damaged, the illnesses become more and more severe leading eventually to many life-threatening infections.

