

New England Journal of Public Policy

Volume 4
Issue 1 *Special Issue on AIDS*

Article 3

1-1-1988

List of Terms

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Recommended Citation

(1988) "List of Terms," *New England Journal of Public Policy*. Vol. 4: Iss. 1, Article 3.
Available at: <https://scholarworks.umb.edu/nejpp/vol4/iss1/3>

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List of Terms

Acquired immuno-deficiency syndrome (AIDS).	A disease caused by a virus known as HIV, in which the body's immune system is seriously damaged, leaving it vulnerable to infections and some rare cancers that ultimately result in death.
AIDS-related complex (ARC).	ARC patients have some symptoms of AIDS, but not the "full-blown" (or "frank") disease. Symptoms may include unexplained swollen glands or fever, weight loss, or persistent diarrhea.
Antibody.	A unique protein produced by blood plasma cells to counteract or kill some specific infectious agents — viruses and bacteria.
Antibody-positive.	A blood test result showing that a person has been infected with HIV at some time and has developed antibodies to HIV. It does <i>not</i> mean that a person has AIDS.
Antigen.	A substance that is foreign to the body and that stimulates the formation of antibodies to combat its presence.
Asymptomatic "carrier."	A person who has had an infectious organism within the body but who feels or shows no outward symptoms.
Asymptomatic infection.	The ability of certain organisms, such as viruses, to get inside a person's cells without resulting in clinical signs or symptoms that tell the person that he or she is infected.
AZT.	Azidothymidine, an antiviral drug that has been shown to prolong life in AIDS patients.
Cofactors.	Agents or other factors that are necessary to increase the probability for development of a disease when the basic causative agent of that disease is present.
ELISA.	Enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay test for antibody.

Epidemiology.	The study of relationships among various factors thought to determine the frequency and distribution of diseases in humans.
Exposure.	The act or condition of coming in contact with but not necessarily being infected by a pathogenic agent.
Hemophilia.	A hereditary blood condition found in males, in which even minor bodily injuries can be followed by prolonged bleeding.
HIV.	The virus that causes AIDS. Formerly referred to as LAV or HTLV-III.
HIV-antibody screening test.	A test whose purpose is to reveal the presence of antibodies to HIV. It is used on all donated blood and organs and in all medical and clinical testing programs. It is also used at alternative or anonymous test sites. If antibodies are detected, it is assumed that the individual or organ is infected.
Idiopathic thrombocytopenic purpura (ITP).	A persistent decrease in blood platelets, of unknown cause, resulting in bruising of skin and tissues.
Immune system.	A system within the body which helps the body resist disease-causing organisms such as germs, viruses, or other infectious agents.
Immunosuppressed.	A state of the body in which the immune system defenses do not work normally — usually as a result of illness or the administration of certain drugs used to fight cancer or prepare the body to accept transplanted donor organs.
Incubation period.	The interval between infection and the appearance of the first symptom. (See “Latency.”)
Infected.	The state of the body in which a part of it has been invaded by a pathogenic agent that ordinarily multiplies and causes harmful effects.
Intravenous drugs.	Drugs injected by needle directly into a vein.
Kaposi’s sarcoma.	A tumor of the blood vessels most frequently seen in the skin or mucous membranes and associated with AIDS.

Latency.	A period when the virus is in the body but rests in an inactive, dormant state. (See “Asymptomatic infection.”)
Lentivirus.	This is a subgroup of the retroviruses. HIV belongs to this subgroup. Generally, viruses of this group replicate slowly and tend to form latent and chronic infections in their hosts.
Lymphocytes.	Specialized white blood cells involved in the immune response.
Morbidity.	The degree of symptomatic illness associated with an infectious organism.
Opportunistic infections.	Those diseases which are caused by agents that are frequently present in our bodies or environment but which cause disease only when there is an alteration from normal healthy conditions — for instance, when the immune system becomes weak or damaged.
Pathogen.	Any disease-producing microorganism or substance.
Perinatal.	Occurring in the period during or just before or after birth.
PGL.	Persistent generalized lymphadenopathy. A persistent swelling of the lymph nodes. In AIDS, a condition of long-term generalized lymph-node swelling characteristic of the so-called AIDS-related complex.
<i>Pneumocystis carinii</i> pneumonia (PCP).	An opportunistic infection of the lung which results in a diagnosis of AIDS.
Prevalence.	The total number of persons in a given population with disease at a given point in time — usually expressed as a percentage.
Prognosis.	Prediction of course and end of a disease, and outlook based on these factors.
Retrovirus.	A genus of viruses which contains the enzyme reverse transcriptase and which requires the synthesis of proviral DNA for its replication.
Seroconversion.	The point at which antibodies to specific antigens are produced by B lymphocytes and become detectable in the blood. “Conversion” refers to change from a negative to positive status, or vice versa.

- Seronegative.** Resulting in a negative reaction to a blood test — the HIV antibody test(s). If high-risk, a person cannot be assumed to be uninfected on the basis of a negative test.
- Seropositive.** Producing a positive reaction to a blood test — the HIV antibody test(s). A person who has a positive and confirmatory test is presumed to be both infected and infectious.
- Syndrome.** A set of signs and symptoms that occur together.
- Vaccine.** A preparation of killed, living attenuated, or living virulent organisms or part of microorganisms which can be administered to produce or increase immunity to a particular disease.
- Viruses.** Submicroscopic pathogens that grow and reproduce only inside living cells, thus causing disease.
- Western blot.** Confirmatory test for antibody.