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An HIV Information Site & HIV Educational Resource Site (HIS & HERS)

Opportunistic Infections Associated with AIDS

or, What are the unusual infections people with AIDS can get?

As the T-cell count gets to lower values (and the HIV viral load gets higher and higher) the person with HIV (who usually has AIDS too) becomes more and more at risk for unusual infections. Many if not all of these unusual infections are quite deadly especially if they are not recognized and treated quickly. The early diagnosis and treatment of these infections is also facilitated by (1) the person in question already having been tested and known to be infected with HIV and (2) the person in question having had recent T-cell counts. If the client has not been tested or known to have HIV, much time and expense can be wasted treating more common illnesses all the while the more serious opportunistic infection is getting worse and worse.

See Table 1 below to get information on the most common opportunistic infections (OI).

Never attempt to diagnose or treat your own opportunistic infection. Many physicians find it difficult to diagnose and treat opportunistic infections after even years of training.

Once an opportunistic infection is treated, usually preventative or maintenance therapy must be prescribed promptly to keep the infection from coming right back.

One important fact is very important to note: The best prevention and treatment for any opportunistic infection is preservation or improvement of the immune system.

Table 1. Opportunistic infections associated with AIDS

Opportunistic Infection type of infection abbreviation	T-cell range	Symptoms	Prevention	Diagnostic Tests	Treatment
esophageal candidiasis fungus none	0-200	White cheesy material on gums in mouth, difficulty and/or pain swallowing	fluconazole (Diflucan)	X-ray of esophagus or esophagoscopy	fluconazole (Diflucan)

<p>Pneumocystis carinii pneumonia parasite or fungus "PCP"</p>	<p>0-250</p>	<p>Dry cough, shortness of breath, fevers, chill, sweats, weight loss - all symptoms get slowly but steadily worse over days to weeks</p>	<p>Bactrim, dapsone, or atovaquone (Mepron)</p>	<p>Chest x-ray, blood oxygen level, exam of sputum</p>	<p>Bactrim, pentamidine, atovaquone (Mepron,) clindamycin plus primaquine, dapsone plus trimethoprim</p>
<p>Cryptococcus neoformans meningitis fungus "crypto"</p>	<p>0-200</p>	<p>Fever, headache, stiff neck, sensitivity to light, dry cough, shortness of breath</p>	<p>sometimes fluconazole (Diflucan)</p>	<p>Spinal tap, blood cultures, blood tests, chest x-ray, sputum exam, CT or MRI of brain</p>	<p>amphotericin B or fluconazole (Diflucan)</p>
<p>histoplasmosis fungi "histo"</p>	<p>0-200</p>	<p>Skin rash, fever, chills, sweats, weakness, ulcers in mouth or on genitals</p>	<p>none</p>	<p>Blood cultures, urine tests, bone marrow examination, blood tests, skin biopsy</p>	<p>amphotericin B or itraconazole (Sporanox)</p>
<p>cytomegalovirus virus "CMV"</p>	<p>0-100</p>	<p>Floater in vision, decreasing vision, fever, cough, shortness of breath, headache</p>	<p>sometime valganciclovir (Valcyte) or ganciclovir (Cytovene)</p>	<p>Urine tests, blood tests, examination of eyes</p>	<p>eye implant (lens), intravenous ganciclovir, intravenous foscarnet (Foscavir,) oral valganciclovir (Valcyte,) intravenous cidofovir (Vistide)</p>
<p>cryptosporidiosis parasite "crypto"</p>	<p>0-100</p>	<p>Severe watery diarrhea</p>	<p>drink filtered or bottled water</p>	<p>Stool tests</p>	<p>intravenous fluids, medications to slow down the bowels, paromomycin, NTZ</p>

<p>disseminated MAC mycobacteria "DMAC"</p>	<p>0-100</p>	<p>High fever, chills, sweats, weight loss, diarrhea, abdominal pain, lymph node swelling</p>	<p>azithromycin (Zithromax), clarithromycin (Biaxin) or rifabutin (Mycobutin)</p>	<p>Blood cultures, bone marrow exams, lymph node biopsy</p>	<p>clarithromycin (Biaxin) or azithromycin (Zithromax) plus ethambutol plus another drug which might be ciprofloxacin (Cipro,) levofloxacin (Levaquin), or rifabutin (Mycobutin)</p>
<p>progressive multifocal leukoencephalopathy virus "PML"</p>	<p>0-200</p>	<p>Stroke-like symptoms, seizures</p>	<p>keeping immune system in good shape</p>	<p>Spinal tap, MRI of brain</p>	<p>improving immune system</p>
<p>toxoplasmosis parasite "toxoplasma"</p>	<p>0-100</p>	<p>Stroke-like symptoms, fever, headache, seizures</p>	<p>Bactrim, dapson plus pyrimethamine (Daraprim)</p>	<p>CT or MRI of brain</p>	<p>sulfadiazine plus pyrimethamine (Daraprim), clindamycin plus pyrimethamine, atovaquone (Mepron) plus pyrimethamine</p>

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