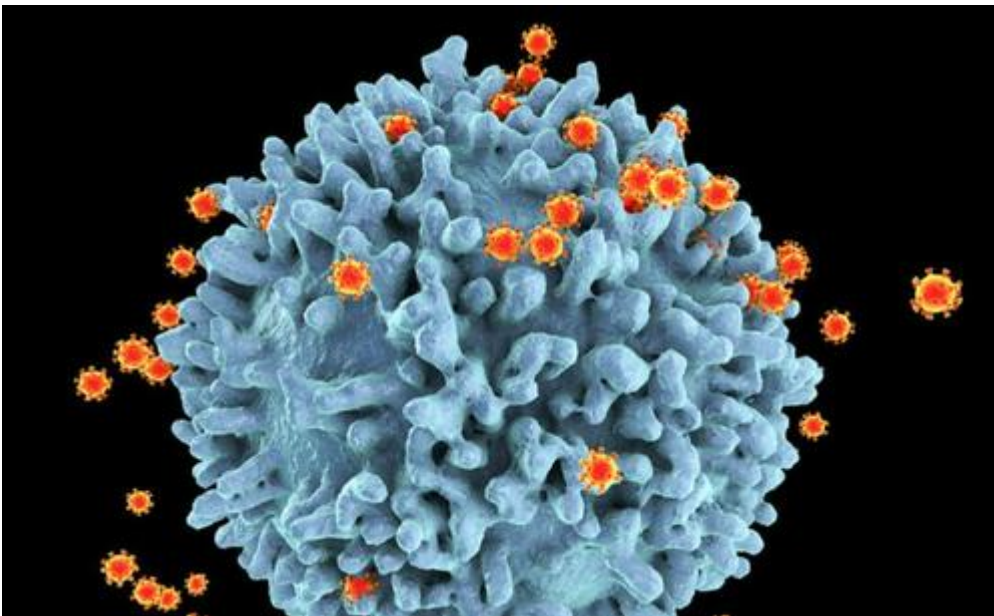


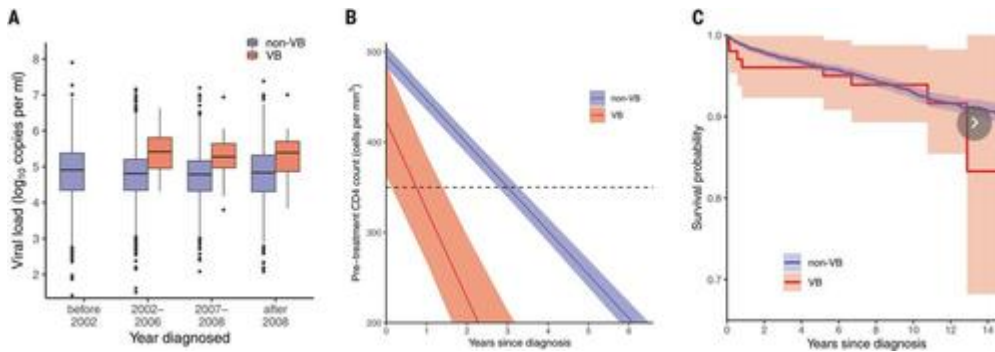
Scientists Discover Highly Infectious Mutant HIV Strain In The Netherlands

Description

UK/NETHERLANDS: A new highly transmissible and much more damaging strain of HIV has just been discovered in the Netherlands by scientists working with Oxford University. They're calling it the "new virulent subtype B" – or "VB", for short.



An international study led by researchers from Oxford's Big Data Institute identified 109 cases of the new variant after analyzing more than 6,700 samples from patients who had tested positive for HIV. Details from the study were published this week in the medical journal [Science](#). The researchers determined that the variant has been circulating in the Netherlands for "several years".



Source: [Science](#)

Their research revealed “significant” genome differences between the VB strain and other HIV variants. One was a much higher viral load, meaning the virus would be both more virulent and more infectious.

“Individuals with the VB variant had a viral load (the level of the virus in the blood) between 3.5 and 5.5 times higher,” the scientists said. The results of their research have been published in the journal *Science*.

According to the research, the rate of CD4 cell decline – the hallmark of immune system damage by HIV – “occurred twice as fast in individuals with the VB variant, placing them at risk of developing AIDS much more rapidly.”

But perhaps more importantly: **patients infected with the VB strain also demonstrated an increased risk of transmitting the virus to other people.**

These conclusions confirm scientists’ long-standing fears: that new mutated strains could make the HIV-1 virus even more infectious and more dangerous. According to the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS, **the virus already affects 38MM people worldwide, and 36MM people have died from AIDS-related illnesses since the start of the epidemic in the early 1980s.**

Fortunately, modern treatments proved just as effective at suppressing the VB strain, a sign that patients infected with it wouldn’t see any difference in their prognosis as those diagnosed with other strains. “There’s no cause for alarm with this new viral variant,” said Oxford epidemiologist Chris Wymant, the lead author on the paper, [during an interview with the AFP](#).

“Reassuringly, after starting treatment, individuals with the VB variant had similar immune system recovery and survival to individuals with other HIV variants,” the study said.

VB has actually been around for a while – decades, from what the scientists could tell. The earliest sample from the study came from a patient diagnosed in 1992.

However, since VB causes a more rapid deterioration of the immune system defenses “this makes it critical that individuals are diagnosed early and start treatment as soon as possible” the researchers said, **also emphasizing the importance of frequent testing for at-risk individuals.**

Finally: the discovery of the VB variant should “**be a warning that we should never be overconfident about saying viruses will just evolve to become milder**” Wymant said.

It’s a lesson “the science” should have already learned from the delta variant of SARS-CoV-2.

by Tyler Durden

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