

The HIV Life Cycle

1 Binding and Fusion: HIV begins its life cycle when it binds to a **CD4 receptor** and one of two **co-receptors** on the surface of a **CD4⁺ T-lymphocyte**. The virus then fuses with the host cell. After fusion, the virus releases RNA, its genetic material, into the host cell.

2 Reverse Transcription: An HIV enzyme called reverse transcriptase converts the single-stranded HIV RNA to double-stranded HIV DNA.

3 Integration: The newly formed HIV DNA enters the host cell's nucleus, where an HIV enzyme called integrase "hides" the HIV DNA within the host cell's own DNA. The integrated HIV DNA is called provirus. The provirus may remain inactive for several years, producing few or no new copies of HIV.

4 Transcription: When the host cell receives a signal to become active, the provirus uses a host enzyme called RNA polymerase to create copies of the HIV genomic material, as well as shorter strands of RNA called messenger RNA (mRNA). The mRNA is used as a blueprint to make long chains of HIV proteins.

5 Assembly: An HIV enzyme called protease cuts the long chains of HIV proteins into smaller individual proteins. As the smaller HIV proteins come together with copies of HIV's RNA genetic material, a new virus particle is assembled.

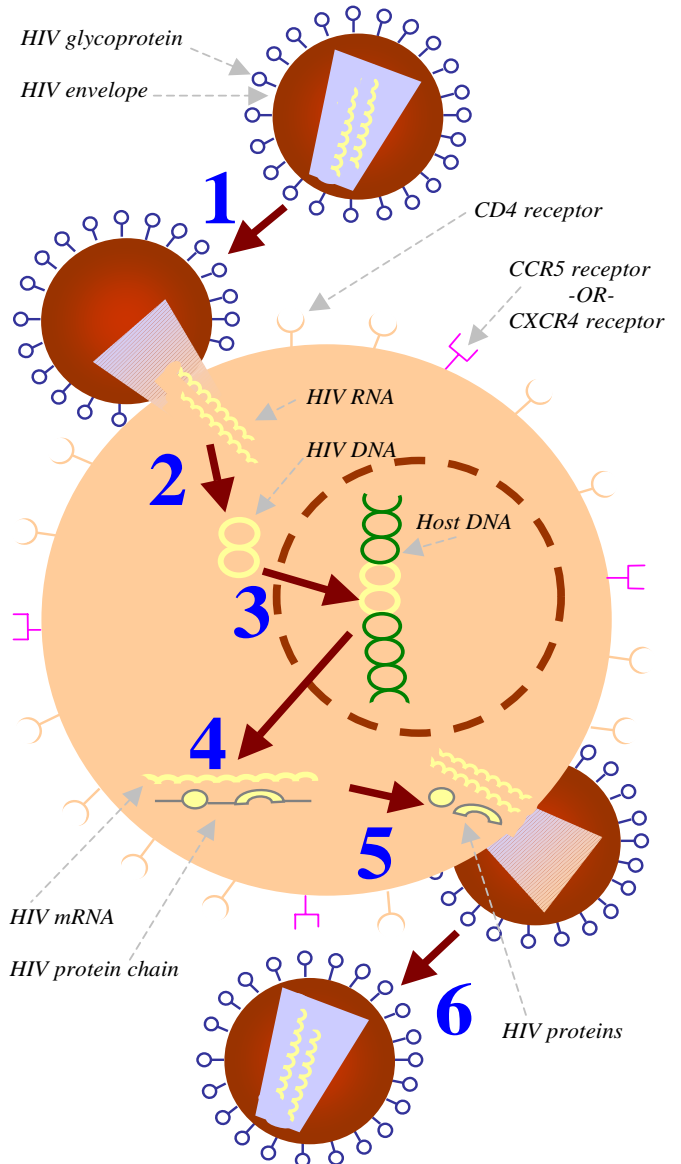
6 Budding: The newly assembled virus pushes out ("buds") from the host cell. During budding, the new virus steals part of the cell's outer envelope. This envelope, which acts as a covering, is studded with protein/sugar combinations called HIV glycoproteins. These HIV glycoproteins are necessary for the virus to bind CD4 and co-receptors. The new copies of HIV can now move on to infect other cells.

Terms Used in This Fact Sheet:

CD4 receptor: A protein present on the outside of infection-fighting white blood cells. CD4 receptors allow HIV to bind to and enter cells.

Co-receptor: In addition to binding a CD4 receptor, HIV must also bind either a CCR5 or CXCR4 co-receptor protein to get into a cell.

T-lymphocyte: A type of white blood cell that detects and fights foreign invaders of the body.



For more information:

Contact your doctor or an AIDSinfo Health Information Specialist at 1-800-448-0440 or <http://aidsinfo.nih.gov>.