

Facts on Viral Infections

Certain viruses change how your cells work, which may lead to cancer.

1 Introduction

A virus is a tiny living microorganism that can only be seen with a microscope and cannot reproduce on their own. To survive, a virus takes over a certain type of cell, then uses the cell structure to make copies of the virus. This usually damages and kills the host cell. However, in some cases, a virus can live within a cell for an extended period of before killing it.

2 Being aware

A virus can enter your body through contaminated air, transmission from a contaminated surface, or even being bitten by a carrier insect such as a mosquito or tick. Viruses usually infect only one type of cell—for example, the virus that causes the common cold infects cells in your nose, mouth, and throat. When you get a virus your white blood cells attack it, these cells also remember how to fight it if the same virus infects your body again. Many viruses make you sick shortly after you contract them and then dissipate. Unfortunately, in some instances viruses can make you sick

long after you contract them and never improve; for example, HIV and the herpes virus are lifelong illnesses.

3 Preventative action

The first line of defense to keep viruses at bay is by following good personal hygiene habits. Prevent infections before they begin and avoid spreading it to others with these easy measures:

- Wash your hands. Be sure to clean your fingertips, under your nails and between your fingers.
- Cover a cough. If no tissue is available, cough or sneeze into your elbow rather than into your hands.
- Wash and bandage all cuts.
- Don't share dishes, glasses, or eating utensils.

4 Staying Well

While viruses are an unavoidable part of life, maintaining good health is still necessary. If you start feeling sick and think you may have a virus, speak to your provider for the best course of treatment. Remember to avoid transmission by keeping healthy habits and maintaining social distancing.

Did you know?

4.1 million people visit emergency departments each year for viral infections.

For more information on viral infections and treatment please visit www.cdc.gov.

References:

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