Test Can Easily ID Broadly Neutralizing Antibodies Against HIV

May 13, 2013

Scientists sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) have developed a powerful new assay that can screen blood for broadly neutralizing antibodies (bNAbs) against HIV. BNAbs are an immune response that about one in five people with HIV will develop one to two years after contracting the virus; they have the capacity to prevent infection in most strains of the HIV. Vaccine researchers have been studying bNAbs in hopes of harnessing their power as a component of a vaccine, so this new assay should aid in such research.

Before this development, ascertaining the specific HIV strains an individual's bNAbs would prevent, as well as how they bind to the virus, was a labor-intensive process requiring a large quantity of blood.

Called neutralization fingerprinting, the new test uses a mathematical algorithm that compares a person's bNAbs with a database scientists have recently collected about bNAbs. This will determine what strains of HIV the person's bNAbs can prevent and at what intensity. The test can be accomplished with only a small blood sample.

Researchers who developed this test believe that the approach could be used to study the immune response to other pathogens, including the flu and hepatitis C virus (HCV).

To read an NIH release on the assay, click here.

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