Another understanding of acute HIV infection is essential to HIV research, both because the window of opportunity to intervene before integration of the virus into the host's DNA is brief, and because acute HIV infection is a critical stage in HIV infection research. Studies are needed to understand acute HIV infection to inform the development of acute HIV cure. The purpose of this paper is to address the ethical issues related to acute HIV infection that may contribute to ethical challenges in HIV clinical research. We identify five ethical domains of potential concern, each related to a stage of research design, which may help guide acute HIV cure studies moving forward.


Acute infection may represent an especially difficult, confusing, and overwhelming period. Diagnoses made during acute infection have been noted as an ethical challenge in HIV research because individuals are most infectious, yet individuals are least likely to know they are infected. The Lancet. 2011;378(9785):319-327.

Acute experiences may be subtly, yet remarkably different. These differences may warrant special ethical attention for clinical research. The Lancet. 2011;378(9785):319-327.

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Conclusion

Acute HIV infection is an important period of HIV disease progression from multiple perspectives: individual well-being, public health transmission prevention, and developments of HIV cure clinical research.

- Global: HIV cure goals are an at early stage and the involvement of human subjects (especially the acute) is yet to be realized. Therefore, it is imperative to move quickly to distill serious ethical worries from merely speculative ones.
- Current evidence suggests that acute HIV infection may introduce special ethical concerns that should be addressed during research design and implementation:
  - Despite the widely accepted scientific importance of acute infection, significant gaps in current exist.
  - Further research is required concerning:
    a) how the social, psychological, and behavioral contexts of acute infection may impact recruitment, retention, and care of participants;
    b) how these issues may best be addressed in HIV cure clinical research protocols.
  - These points of consideration and potential avenues for risk mitigation (see Table 1) may provide an initial foundation for ethical guidelines focused on research with people diagnosed during acute HIV infection.

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The ethics of HIV cure clinical research among acutely infected adults: points for consideration

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