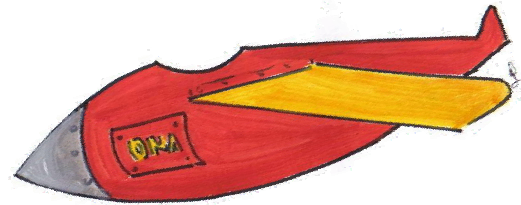


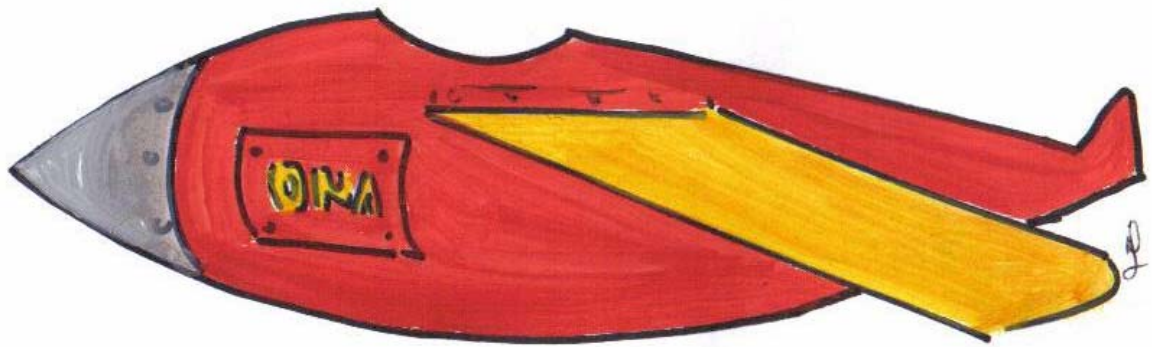
# Understanding HIV



**Marcelle R.D. Smith**



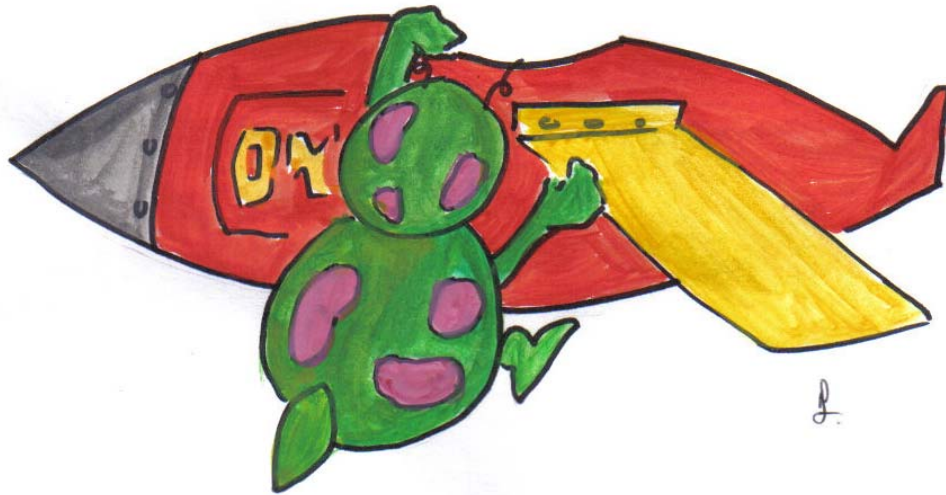
The Human Immuno Deficiency Virus (**HIV**) is a very tiny germ, too small to see. It enters the body through unsafe sex or dirty injection needles.



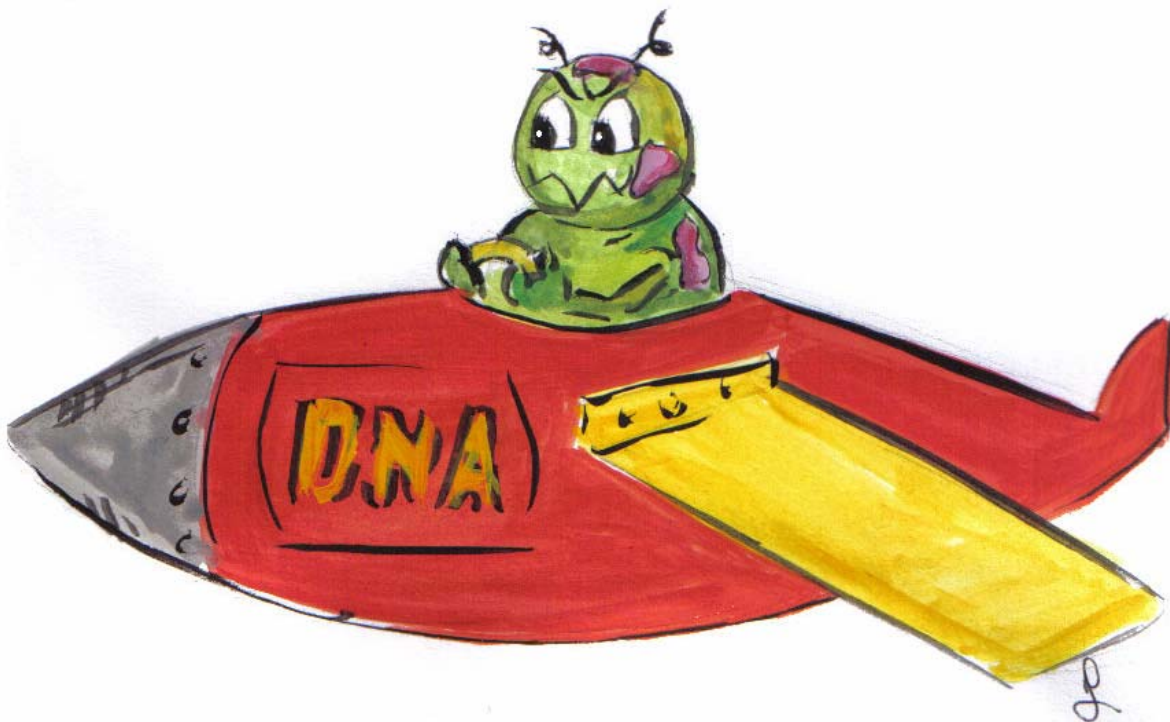
This represents the **T-cell**. The T-cell is like the body's defence force. It protects the body by fighting off the germs that make us sick.



The T-cell is controlled by **DNA**. This is like the engine of the T-cell. It controls all the jobs that the cell has to do. Viruses like HIV can also use parts of the DNA to build more germs just like themselves.



The virus enters the T-cell and takes control of it.

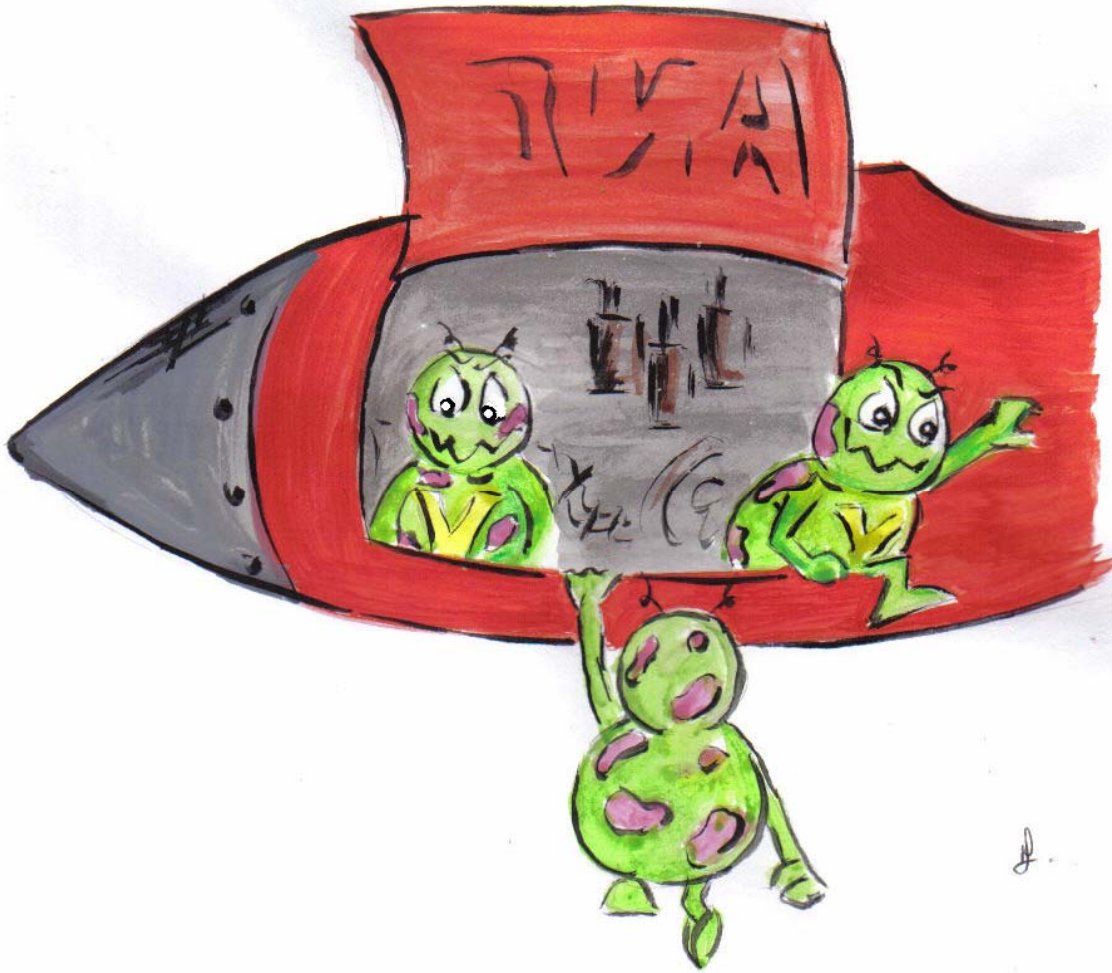




The virus destroys the T-cell so that it can no longer protect us from it.



It uses parts of the T-cell's DNA (engine) to make more of itself (multiply). The virus now increases in number.



If the virus is allowed to reach high numbers in the body, the T-cells can no longer protect us. Then any sickness that we get, even those that are usually harmless, becomes very dangerous to us.





**ARV'S** or Anti-retrovirals are medicines that we use to protect ourselves if we have HIV in our bodies. They don't kill the virus. Instead, they protect the engine (DNA) so that the virus can't use it to make more of itself. In this way the medicines keep the number of viruses in the body low so that we stay healthy for much longer.



The virus is strong and it constantly tries to 'beat' the ARV's by changing and trying to become stronger. This is why they have to taken every day to keep their protection strong.



If the medicines are not taken as they should be, this gives the virus enough time to 'break through' their protection, get control over the DNA and grow in number.



These medicines now become powerless against the virus. The virus becomes too strong and they no longer work. This is called **resistance**.

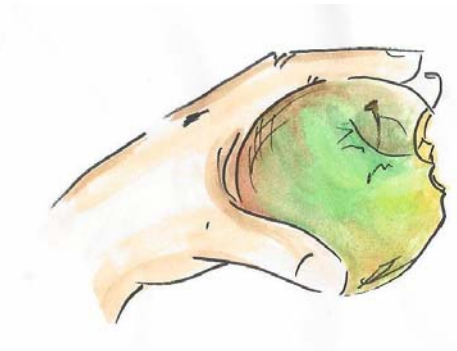
## Important things to remember:

- Even if a person is using ARV's, this does not mean that they cannot give HIV to someone else.
- Never touch someone else's blood especially if you have cuts or bruises on your skin. If you have to for some important reason, always protect yourself by using gloves.



- Using a condom while having sex is a very important way to stop a person from getting HIV.

- You cannot get HIV from another person by touching them, eating the same food or sharing a toilet, unless you come into contact with their blood.



- Never touch used injection needles or medical waste containing blood.

