

## Science News

### UPI NewsTrack Health and Science News

#### Modified immune cells found to fight HIV

PHILADELPHIA, Feb. 25 (UPI) -- U.S. scientists say a genetic modification of immune cells significantly reduced the number of infected cells in HIV patients who stopped antiviral treatment.

Researchers from the University of Pennsylvania and the VIRxSYS Corp. of Gaithersburg, Md., said they investigated the effects of Lexgenleucel-T, a product made by the company to treat HIV infection. Lexgenleucel-T genetically modifies a class of immune cells called CD4 T-cells.

The scientists said they took white blood cells from patients with human immunodeficiency virus infections. CD4 T-cells are then isolated and genetically modified to inhibit replication of HIV. Those modified CD4 T-cells are then put back into the patient.

In their study, the researchers said they gave infusions of Lexgenleucel-T modified CD4 T-cells to 17 HIV-infected patients who had been using the standard regimen of highly active antiretroviral therapy, or triple-cocktail drug therapy.

Six weeks after the final infusion, patients discontinued the antiretroviral therapy to evaluate counts of virus-infected cells and changes in CD4 T-cell count. Of the eight patients who could be evaluated, the scientists said seven showed a decrease in viral load set point. High viral load set points are associated with more rapid disease progression to AIDS.

The study that included scientists from the Jacobi Medical Center in New York was presented last week in San Francisco during the 16th Conference on Retroviruses and Opportunistic Infections.