



Providing Medical Evidence for Individuals with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) Infection

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A Guide for Health Professionals

This fact sheet is a guide to assist you in providing the kinds of medical evidence we need to evaluate disability claims filed by individuals with HIV infection. When an individual with HIV infection applies for Social Security disability benefits, we must decide whether he or she is disabled under the law. We make our determination or decision based on the information you provide and other evidence, including information provided by the individual.

We appreciate your assistance in providing us with timely reports and other medical records. You may send medical records to us by mail or by using Social Security's Electronic Records Express service to fax documents or submit them online via Social Security's secure website.

Medical Report of HIV Infection

In certain circumstances, we can make payments to needy individuals before making a final disability determination if there is a high degree of probability that the individual is disabled. In order to decide if the individual qualifies for these "presumptive disability" payments, we need some medical information as soon as the individual files a disability claim.

You may receive a check-block form SSA-4814 (Medical Report on Adult with Allegation of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) Infection) or SSA-4815 (Medical Report on Child with Allegation of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) Infection) or a telephone call from a Social Security field office (FO) to verify the presence of the manifestations of HIV infection in a patient. The form will include complete

instructions, and will tell you to return the form to the Social Security FO. You can also access these forms on the Online Forms Page of the Social Security website. If you already have SSA-4814 or SSA-4815 forms in your possession, please make sure they are up-to-date. We cannot process these forms unless you complete the most recent version. We recommend checking the website to confirm you are using the correct form, even if you have completed this document in the past. Please return the form to the FO as quickly as possible. The FO's request for the completed form may be followed by the Disability Determination Services (DDS) request for additional evidence.

Definition of Disability

Federal law requires a very strict definition of disability. While some programs give money to people with partial disability or short-term disability, Social Security does not. An individual is considered disabled by Social Security if he or she is unable to do any substantial gainful work activity because of a medical condition(s), that has lasted, or can be expected to last, for at least 12 months, or that is expected to result in death. A child under the age of 18 is considered disabled if he or she suffers from any medical condition(s) that results in marked and severe functional limitations that has lasted, or can be expected to last, for at least 12 months, or that is expected to result in death.

Evaluation of Claims Involving HIV Infection

Many individuals with HIV infection have a condition that prevents them from being able to work. If their conditions meet the duration requirement, they may be found disabled. On the other hand, individuals with HIV infection who are asymptomatic, or who have less severe HIV manifestations, may be found not disabled. We evaluate each disability case on an individual basis, and rely on the signs, symptoms, laboratory findings, and other information in the individual's case record in order to make a determination or decision.

As in all disability claims, we first try to resolve the issue of disability based on the medical information alone. If the medical information shows either that the individual is clearly disabled, or that the individual is clearly not disabled, we decide the case based on that information. Otherwise, we go on to consider other factors, such as functional capacity in light of the individual's condition(s), age, education, and work background. If a child under age 18 has a functional limitation because of his or her medical condition(s), we consider the child's functioning in relation to other children of the same age who do not have the medical condition(s). You can find more detailed information about our disability evaluation process on the Disability Evaluation Under Social Security page of the Medical/Professional Relations section of our website.

What We Need from You

We need information from you that will help us determine the existence, severity, and duration of the individual's impairment(s).

Medical reports you provide to us should include a thorough description of the individual's medical history with information on the diagnosis, onset, and duration of the individual's impairment(s), and prognosis. It is important to describe the full clinical course of the illness, as that will help us determine when the HIV infection or associated conditions became disabling (the disability "onset"). Establishing the correct disability onset date is important because it may affect when cash benefits and Medicare coverage begin.

Medical reports should also describe the standard positive and negative findings of a thorough physical or mental examination, consistent with accepted medical practice. Progress notes that document findings are also helpful. Include in your reports all clinical findings and laboratory findings, including any results of HIV testing. (The DDS will have an appropriate release form for HIV test results.) A diagnosis of HIV infection that is not supported by laboratory test results should be explained.

Examples of other laboratory findings may include:

- CD4 counts;
- Abnormal blood counts (e.g., hematocrit);
- Radiographic or other imaging abnormalities; and
- Pertinent microbiology or pathology reports.

Please report any signs you have observed, such as:

- Muscle weakness or progressive motor dysfunction;
- Documented persistent fever;
- Documented weight loss;
- Dyspnea;
- Neurological complications related to HIV infection (for example, HIV encephalopathy or peripheral neuropathy); or
- Mental abnormalities causing impairments, such as difficulty concentrating.

Also, include in your reports any symptoms or other effects of HIV infection. Examples include an individual's statements about:

- Persistent low energy, fatigue, weakness, or pain;
- Fever, or night sweats;
- Shortness of breath;
- Persistent cough;
- Persistent diarrhea;
- Depression;
- Anxiety;
- Cognitive impairments, such as loss of concentration, or slowness of thought;
- Headaches;
- Nausea; and
- Vomiting.

Your descriptions of any functional limitations you noted throughout the time you examined or treated the patient are very important. If possible, provide your opinion of the individual's ability to do daily activities or work-related physical and mental activities. Tell us your opinions about both the individual's physical and mental functions and, to the extent possible, the reasons for your opinions, such as the clinical findings and your observations of the individual.

Examples of work-related functions include:

- Physical functions: Walking, standing, sitting, lifting, pushing, pulling, reaching, carrying, and handling.
- Mental functions: The ability to understand, remember, and carry out simple instructions, the ability to use appropriate judgment, and the ability to respond appropriately to supervision, co-workers, and usual work situations, including changes in a routine work setting.

Contacting Social Security

The most convenient way to contact us anytime, anywhere is to visit www.socialsecurity.gov where you can also take care of some business with an online *my* Social Security account.

Call us toll-free at **1-800-772-1213** or at **1-800-325-0778** (TTY) if you're deaf or hard of hearing. We can answer your calls from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m., week days. Or use our automated services via telephone, 24 hours a day. We look forward to serving you.



Securing today
and tomorrow