

PrEP

PrEP is short for pre-exposure prophylaxis. The word prophylaxis means to prevent or control the spread of an infection or disease. The goal of PrEP is to prevent HIV infection from taking hold if you are exposed to the virus.

PrEP is medication a person can take to reduce the risk of getting HIV. PrEP involves taking a pill once daily to prevent HIV infection in someone who is HIV-negative.

Currently, there are two PrEP medications. The first (name brand Truvada) is for all people at risk. A newer drug (brand name Descovy) is approved only for cisgender men and transwomen. PrEP involves a single pill, taken once per day.

Who is PrEP recommended for?

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) offers these guidelines on people who should consider taking PrEP:

- Anyone who is in an ongoing relationship with someone who is HIV-positive.
- Gay or bisexual men who have had anal sex without a condom or have been diagnosed with an STI in the past 6 months.
- Heterosexual men or women who do not regularly use condoms with partners with an unknown HIV status who are at substantial risk for HIV infections (e.g. people who inject drugs).
- People who have injected illicit drugs in the past 6 months and have shared injection equipment or have been in treatment for injection drug use in the past 6 months.

OVERVIEW

- PrEP involves daily medication to prevent HIV infection in someone who is HIV-negative.
- PrEP medication includes antiretroviral drugs that stop the virus from reproducing in the body.
- When taking PrEP daily, it has been shown to reduce the risk of getting HIV by more than 90%. From those at risk of HIV from injection drug use, it lowers the risk by more than 70%.

Who shouldn't take PrEP?

PrEP is not recommended for those who:

- have HIV or are unsure if they have HIV
- have symptoms of acute HIV infection (similar to flu symptoms)
- had a single uncommon situation with potential HIV exposure or those who plan on taking PrEP for short periods of time. Those who are concerned about a possible HIV infection exposure that occurred within the last 72 hours should be considered for PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis), not PrEP

How safe is PrEP?

No serious side effects have been found with PrEP. Some side effects may include nausea, headaches, vomiting and loss of appetite but these seem to go away over time. If you do take PrEP and notice any side effects that are severe or do not go away, talk to your healthcare provider.

It's possible that PrEP may affect your kidneys, but usually any changes are minor and reversible—meaning kidney function is restored when you stop taking the medication. A healthcare provider will monitor your kidney health regularly while you are taking PrEP.

How do you get PrEP and pay for it?

PrEP has to be prescribed so the first step for anyone seeking PrEP is to talk to their healthcare provider.

The healthcare provider will ask some questions to make sure PrEP is the right choice based on risk factors and requirements. Taking PrEP not only requires a commitment to taking the medicine every day, but also agreeing to HIV and STI tests and follow-up visits.

Many health insurance companies cover the cost of PrEP. For those without a healthcare provider, local health centers or health departments may be able to assist with locating a provider for PrEP. ASHA's website, SayYesToPrEP.org, also has a clinic locator for those trying to find PrEP in their area.

Additional resources for assistance include:

- The ReadySetPrEP program provides free PrEP to those who qualify. Visit readyssetprep.hiv.gov
- The Partnership for Prescription Assistance (PPA): 1-888-4PPA-NOW (1-888-477-2669)
- Gilead's Advancing Access program offers payment assistance. Call 1-800-226-2056.

What is on-demand PrEP?

Also called "intermittent" or "event driven" PrEP, this type of PrEP involves taking pills on a 2-1-1 schedule—2 pills taken at least two hours but up to 24 hours before sex, 1 pill 24 hours after the first dose, and on pill 24 hours after the second dose.

This is considered "off-label" use of PrEP, but there is evidence that shows that 2-1-1 PrEP can be effective. For example, investigators in the The IPERGAY trial found that taking PrEP on a 2-1-1 schedule reduced the risk of HIV infection by 86% in men who have sex with men. However, on-demand PrEP has only been studied in cisgender men who have sex with men.

While on-demand PrEP isn't part of CDC's guidelines for PrEP use, someone interested in this option should consult with a healthcare provider. You can search for a provider near you at www.pleaseprepme.org.

Learn More

Learn more about HIV and other STIs from the American Sexual Health Association, a trusted nonprofit organization that has advocated on behalf of those at risk for STIs for more than a century. Our websites include:

www.ashasexualhealth.org
www.iwannaknow.org
www.quierosaber.org
www.nccc-online.org
www.askexpertsnow.com
www.YESmeansTEST.org

