



# PROTECTING YOURSELF FROM HIV THROUGH PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS (PrEP):

What You Need to Know

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## Protecting yourself from HIV through Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP): What you need to know

What are you doing to protect yourself from HIV? Better treatments have improved the quality of life for people living with HIV. But HIV can still make people very sick, and more than 50,000 people still get HIV each year in the United States.

This informational guide will tell you about some important ways that you and your health care provider can work together to protect you against HIV. One of the most promising new ways is known as Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP).

PrEP is the use of HIV treatment medications by HIV-negative people to protect them from getting HIV. Recently, the Food & Drug Administration (FDA) approved such a medication, tenofovir-emtricitabine, for PrEP.

### STEP 1: GETTING TESTED FOR HIV

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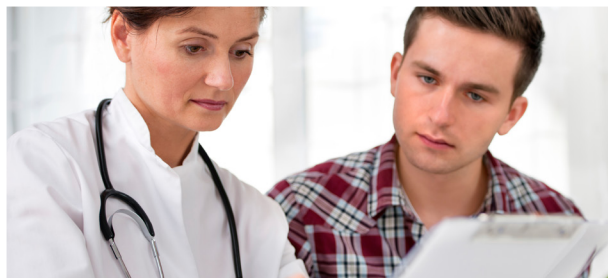
- In the United States, one in five people with HIV do not know they are infected.
- Everyone aged 13 to 64 should be tested for HIV at least once, even if they do not think they are at risk for HIV.
- People who are at high risk for HIV infection should be tested more often.
- You have a high risk of becoming infected with HIV if:
  - You have sex with people who have HIV
  - You are a man who has sex with other men (especially if you don't always use condoms, have had sexually transmitted infections, or use drugs or alcohol while having sex)
  - You trade sex for money, things you need, or services
  - You inject drugs to get high

## STEP 2: WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO PROTECT YOURSELF?

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If you are HIV-negative, there are many ways to lower your chances of becoming infected with HIV. Different ways include:

- Safer-sex counseling from your health care provider or HIV testing counselor. Here, you will get information to help you make choices about how many people you have sex with, what types of sex you have, and how to protect yourself from HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- Using condoms and lubrication every time you have sex. Be sure to use lubrication that is safe to use with condoms, such as water-based ones.
- Testing and treatment for other STIs. Having an STI can increase your chance of becoming infected with HIV.
- Taking PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis): PEP is an emergency medication taken after a high-risk exposure to HIV. PEP is available in many providers' offices and emergency departments and must be taken as soon as possible after sex (or other high-risk exposure) in order to be effective.
- Using the PrEP Package (pre-exposure prophylaxis): The PrEP package involves taking an anti-HIV medication every day, as well as using condoms consistently, getting frequent HIV and STI testing, and seeing your health care provider. It is only for people at high risk of getting HIV.
- Using sterile syringes and not sharing works with other people when injecting drugs.



## USING PrEP: MORE THAN JUST TAKING A PILL

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Studies have shown that people who were given PrEP had a lower chance of getting HIV compared to people who were not given PrEP. But PrEP is more than just taking an anti-HIV pill. To protect you, PrEP must include:

- Taking the pill every day, without missing a single dose. In PrEP studies, people who took the pill as directed had the lowest chance of becoming infected with HIV.
- Seeing your health care provider on a regular basis to discuss: if you are having any side effects from PrEP; if you are having trouble taking the medication as directed; and to have testing for HIV and sometimes other blood tests to make sure the pill is not harming you.
- Ongoing safer-sex counseling with your provider.
- Using condoms and lubrication every time you have sex.
- Testing and treatment for other STIs.



PrEP is not 100% effective at preventing HIV. Even if you take the pill as directed, you may still become infected with HIV. While using PrEP, it is important that you continue to use the other ways to protect yourself, as discussed above.

### **HOW SAFE IS IT TO USE PrEP?**

In the United States, only one drug, tenofovir-emtricitabine, has been FDA-approved for use as part of the PrEP Package. So far, studies have shown that tenofovir-emtricitabine is safe and has few side effects when used for PrEP.

Tenofovir-emtricitabine may cause nausea or other gastrointestinal symptoms in less than 5% of people who take it for PrEP. These side effects usually go away after a few days to a few weeks.

Tenofovir-emtricitabine can cause kidney or bone problems for a small number of people who take it for PrEP. You should not use it for PrEP if you have problems with your kidneys or bones.

Talk to your health care provider, or see the websites below, for more information on how using this pill for PrEP might be harmful or cause side effects for some people.

### **INSURANCE COVERAGE**

You should contact your health insurance organization to learn if they will cover part or all of the cost of PrEP. Some insurers have already agreed to pay for PrEP. Other insurers have not yet decided if they will pay for PrEP.

### **OTHER THINGS TO THINK ABOUT BEFORE USING PrEP**

Before being prescribed tenofovir-emtricitabine, you will need to have:

- A negative test for HIV.
- A blood test to see how well your kidneys work.
- Testing and treatment for STIs, including hepatitis B.
- Safer-sex counseling.
- If you are a woman, a pregnancy test. If you are planning to become pregnant, you should discuss this with your provider. You will also need to discuss which birth control options may be right for you while using PrEP. Women who breastfeed must not use PrEP.

While using tenofovir-emtricitabine, you will need to have:

- HIV testing every 2-3 months or sooner if you have symptoms that could be a sign of HIV infection.
- Follow-up visits with your health care provider at least every 2-3 months to discuss: whether you are able to continue taking the drug as directed; whether you are having side effects; and to have testing for STIs. At these visits, you should also discuss ways to have safer sex and whether you are able to use condoms when you have sex.
- If you are a woman, you will need pregnancy testing every 3 months. If you become pregnant, it will be important to discuss with your health care providers whether or not you should keep taking PrEP.

## OTHER WEBSITES ABOUT PrEP

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- Information on PrEP from the Centers for Disease Control: <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/prep/>
- Information about PrEP from Gilead Sciences, a company that makes the PrEP pill: <http://www.truvadapreprems.com/pre-exposure-prophylaxis>

## KEY POINTS

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- Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) means taking an HIV medication every day in order to prevent HIV infection.
- PrEP is only appropriate for those at high risk of becoming infected with HIV.
- The drug tenofovir-emtricitabine is FDA-approved for PrEP.
- Tenofovir-emtricitabine is not 100% effective at preventing HIV. You must still use condoms and practice safer sex if using PrEP.
- If you take tenofovir-emtricitabine for PrEP, you must see your health care provider every 2-3 months for check-ups, tests, and safer sex counseling.
- There are several ways to protect yourself against HIV. Talking to your health care provider can help you choose what options are best for you.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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