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Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV



Working in partnership with Terrence Higgins Trust.

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What is PrEP?

PrEP is a way of preventing people who are HIV-negative from acquiring HIV infection by taking a pill containing two anti-HIV drugs, emtricitabine and tenofovir disoproxil. If the person taking PrEP is exposed to HIV, the anti-HIV drugs in their body stop the virus from entering cells and replicating. This prevents HIV from establishing itself and stops the virus from taking hold.

How effective is PrEP?

Research shows that PrEP is highly effective in preventing the sexual transmission of HIV, as long as it is taken properly, as directed. It works for people of all genders, including those who are transgender and those who identify as non-binary. While PrEP can prevent HIV, it does not offer any protection against other sexually transmitted infections, such as gonorrhoea, chlamydia, syphilis and hepatitis C, or prevent unwanted pregnancy.

Can anyone use PrEP?

PrEP is not the right choice for everyone. It is most likely to benefit those who are at higher risk of HIV infection e.g.:

- Men who have sex with men (MSM)
- Trans men and women
- People with partners from parts of the world where the rate of HIV is much higher
- People with an HIV positive partner who does not have an undetectable viral load
- People who do not always use condoms for sex.

People who are able to consistently use condoms and other HIV prevention strategies and those who's partners definitely don't have HIV or whose partner is living with HIV but taking HIV treatment and has an undetectable viral load, do not need to take PrEP.

PrEP may also not be suitable if it would be difficult for you to take the pills as directed without missing doses, and/or you are unable to attend the clinic for regular medical appointments.

As part of this assessment, you will be asked some questions regarding your sexual behaviour and sexual partners and your medical and vaccination history and any other medicines that you take. Before starting PrEP, you will need to have an HIV test to check that you are HIV negative and you will need to be tested for some other sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including hepatitis B and C. Your kidney function will also be checked and, if appropriate, a pregnancy test will be undertaken. You will be vaccinated against Hepatitis A and B and human papilloma virus (HPV), if necessary.

Once the results of your tests have been reported, the clinician will discuss these with you and, if it is decided that PrEP is right for you, arrangements will be made for the supply of PrEP. Most patients will be issued with three months' supply which you will be asked to come to the clinic to collect.

Once I start taking PrEP, how will I be followed up and monitored?

When you open your last month's supply of PrEP, which for most patients will be about 2 months after starting on it, **if you don't already have an appointment booked**, you will need to contact your clinic to book a follow-up consultation for review. Again, this is likely to take place via telephone. You will also need to be tested for STIs, including HIV, which may be done using a free self-testing kit. You will have your kidney function checked once a year whilst taking PrEP or more frequently (at least 6 monthly) if you are at increased risk of side effects affecting your kidneys and, if indicated, a pregnancy test will be performed.

At your follow-up consultation the clinician will check:

- that PrEP is still suitable for you
- for any side effects
- that you have been taking it correctly.

If continuing on PrEP, arrangements will be made for you to collect a new supply of medicines. **After your second supply of medicines, you may be offered an option to request your next supply of PrEP, and have a follow up, online. Your clinician will discuss this with you if this option is considered appropriate for you.**

Please note that if you delay arranging your follow-up until you have run-out, or nearly run-out, of PrEP, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to see you in time without you needing to have a break in taking PrEP. This could potentially result in you losing the protection that PrEP offers and you may need to start taking it again, allowing the appropriate 'lead in' time before protection is conferred once again. It is also important that you complete the required screening as advised by your clinician in order for us to be able to continue your supplies of PrEP.

Can I take these medicines if I am, or could be, pregnant or am breast-feeding?

Please tell your clinician if you could be, or are, pregnant or are breastfeeding. If there is a risk that you could be pregnant, you will be asked to do a pregnancy test as a part of our initial assessment and monitoring processes. PrEP may be taken by those who are pregnant or breastfeeding if there is an ongoing risk of HIV acquisition but your clinician will discuss the potential risks and benefits of this with you.

Am I allergic to anything in the medicine?

The ingredients of the tablets may vary depending on the brand you are issued. Always check the patient information leaflet supplied with your medicine to check that it does not contain any ingredients that you are allergic to. Please let your clinician know if you think you may be allergic to any of the ingredients.

Is PrEP different from PEP?

Yes, PrEP is different from PEP. PEP, which refers to 'post-exposure prophylaxis', is taken for 28 days *after* someone has had sex if there is a risk that they may have been exposed to HIV. PrEP is taken on an ongoing basis **before** sex. Both share the aim of preventing HIV infection.

How do I store my medicines?

You should store your medicines at room temperature (less than 25°C) in a safe place out of the reach of children.

I'm interested in taking PrEP - what do I need to do now?

Please contact your local iCaSH clinic on 0300 300 3030. **They will take your details and place you on a waiting list for PrEP. Once an appointment becomes available**, the clinic will contact you to arrange your preliminary assessment to establish whether or not PrEP is suitable for you and, if so, what the most appropriate way for you to take PrEP is. This is likely to take place by telephone.

How do I take PrEP?

PrEP can be taken with or after food. If you find it difficult to swallow the tablet whole, it can be dispersed in approximately 100ml of water, orange juice or grape juice and taken immediately.

- If you are sick within 1 hour of taking PrEP, another tablet should be taken. If you are sick more than 1 hour after taking PrEP, taking a second dose is not necessary.

PrEP can be taken **either regularly or 'on demand'**. How you take it depends on your circumstances and how often you have sex:

Regular Dosing

Regular dosing is more suitable for people who are at ongoing high risk of acquiring HIV, for example if they have sex every week. This is because taking PrEP daily maintains protective levels of the drugs in the body so that it is not necessary to plan taking PrEP around when you may have sex.

When taken daily, it offers protection against HIV for both anal and vaginal sex and can be taken by MSM and heterosexual people, including trans men, trans women, and non-trans (cis) men and women.

1. Daily dosing:

- Daily dosing involves taking a single pill continuously, every day
 - It should be taken at approximately the same time each day as part of your daily routine, although taking it a couple of hours early or late on occasion should not be problematic.

2. Intermittent dosing (also known as 'Ts and S'):

- This involves taking a single pill regularly four times a week on a Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday and Sunday).

Regular dosing may be started by taking a double dose (two pills) for the first dose **BEFORE** sex. This gives protection within two hours.

Event-based dosing (sometimes called Event-driven (ED) or On-demand (OD) dosing):

‘Event-based dosing’ (or ‘event-driven’ (ED) or ‘On-demand (OD) dosing’ involves only using PrEP when you want to have sex. It may be appropriate for people who have sex less often than once a week and who usually know when they may be likely to have sex. It can’t be used if you have hepatitis B (TBC).

1. 2:1:1 dosing:

- Involves starting with a double dose and then taking daily PrEP for two days after sex.
 - Each dose should be roughly 24 hours after the previous one.
- 2:1:1 dosing can be used by anyone for anal sex (if you are the insertive or receptive partner) or insertive vaginal/frontal sex. It cannot be used for receptive vaginal/frontal sex.

2. 2:7 dosing:

- Involves starting with a double dose and then taking daily PrEP for seven days after sex.
 - Each dose should be roughly 24 hours after the previous one.
- 2:7 dosing needs to be used by cis women and trans and nonbinary people who are having receptive vaginal/frontal sex.

The pre-dose is important for the highest protection when using event-based dosing. But if you miss or are late with the pre-dose, start with a double dose as soon as you can.

Your clinician will discuss the various options with you and advise on the most appropriate dosing for you.

Am I likely to experience side effects from PrEP?

Most people who take PrEP don’t experience side effects. However, like all medicines, it can cause side effects in some people.

Some of these side effects are usually experienced only during the first few weeks of taking PrEP as your body is getting used to taking it. These include tiredness, gastrointestinal symptoms such as feeling sick (nausea), bloating and diarrhoea, and headache. These are usually minor and tend to pass on their own after a week or two.

Whilst long term side effects are rare, occasionally, taking PrEP can affect the kidneys or bones. Such effects may return to normal after stopping taking PrEP. Your kidney function will be monitored whilst taking PrEP so any problems can be detected early. If you have bone or kidney problems, or are high risk of these, you may be offered a different type of PrEP which provides protection against these side effects.

For more detailed information, please consult the patient information leaflets supplied with PrEP.

Can I take PrEP with other medicines?

PrEP does not interact with most other medicines but tenofovir disoproxil, one of the medicines in the most commonly used type of PrEP, should be used with caution with some other drugs that can affect the kidneys, such as non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) e.g. ibuprofen and naproxen, as taking both drugs together can increase the risk of kidney problems.

If you are taking any other medicines, including herbal, complementary or other medicines you buy ‘over-the-counter’ or online or ‘party’/recreational drugs, please ensure that you tell your clinician so that they can check that they are safe to take with PrEP.

PrEP is very safe for trans and non-binary people taking hormone therapy.

What happens if I miss a dose?

It is really important that you take PrEP as directed as its effectiveness in reducing the risk of acquiring HIV is dependent on it being taken properly, as directed. If you are unable to do this and miss tablets regularly, PrEP may not work.

Daily PrEP:

One of the benefits of taking daily PrEP is that occasionally missing a dose will not render PrEP ineffective. However, if you miss a dose, you should take the dose as soon as you remember but, if 24 hours has already elapsed since the time you should have taken it, you should not double dose. If you are missing several doses each week, please talk to your clinic about this so that we can try to support you with this.

If you use daily dosing and miss more than a week of pills, you will need to start again; depending on how you are using PrEP, this will involve taking either seven days of daily dosing or the double two-pill dose to get full protection as outlined above. If you may have been at risk of exposure to HIV when you haven't been taking PrEP, or enough PrEP, please contact your clinic to discuss whether you might need post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) and another HIV test.

'On demand' PrEP:

If you are using 'On Demand' PrEP it's really important not to miss any doses:

If you miss a dose, please contact your clinic in case PEP is recommended.

- If you miss the BEFORE dose, still take a double dose as soon as possible AFTER sex, and continue single daily doses.

Stopping taking PrEP:

1. Regular dosing:

- Before stopping daily or intermittent dosing, you need to continue for either two or seven days after you last had sex. This depends on how you are dosing PrEP.

2. Event-based dosing:

- You need to continue daily dosing for either another two days (2:1:1 dosing) or seven days (2:7 dosing).

For more information on how to take PrEP, please go to: <https://i-base.info/guides/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/PrEP-guide-UK-Feb-2024-FIN.pdf>