

# HIV Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis

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## **What is PrEP?**

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is the use of medication by a HIV-negative person to prevent HIV infection. PrEP is a tablet containing a combination of two drugs that are also used to treat people living with HIV, tenofovir and emtricitabine.

## **Is PrEP for me?**

PrEP is suitable for you if you are at medium to high risk of HIV infection. For example, if you are a man who has sex with men (MSM) without using condoms and/or you have a sexual partner who has HIV and is not on treatment. PrEP may also be suitable for you if you are a heterosexual man or woman, transgender person or someone who injects drugs depending on your level of HIV risk.

PrEP is not recommended for people who consistently use condoms, who have partners who are HIV negative and/or who have partners who are HIV positive with an undetectable viral load.

## **Is PrEP effective?**

Several large clinical trials have shown that PrEP significantly reduces the risk of HIV infection. For people who take PrEP as prescribed by their doctor, PrEP prevents almost 100 per cent of HIV infections.

PrEP does not protect you against other sexually transmissible infections (STI) like syphilis, chlamydia and gonorrhoea. When you are taking PrEP, it is important for you to consider STI prevention and have STI screening every three months, as advised by your doctor.

## **Is PrEP safe?**

Clinical trials also provided safety information on PrEP. Some people in the trials had early side-effects such as nausea, loss of appetite and headaches, but these were mild and usually disappeared within the first month. No serious side-effects were observed. A small proportion of people taking PrEP may experience changes in their bone mineral density or develop kidney damage. It is important for you to have regular kidney tests while taking PrEP, and your doctor may also recommend bone density testing.

## **What do I have to do to get PrEP?**

If you are interested in accessing PrEP, speak to your doctor to see if you are eligible. Any GP, other medical specialist or authorised nurse practitioner can prescribe PrEP. If you are likely to benefit from taking PrEP, blood tests to assess your kidney and liver function, in addition to an HIV test, will be done. Once you have met the eligibility criteria and want to start PrEP, you will be given a prescription. The prescription can be filled at any pharmacy but it is a good idea to phone ahead and check if the pharmacy has some in stock, or need to order it in.

## **How frequently will I need to have appointments with my doctor once I start taking PrEP?**

Taking PrEP will require you to visit your doctor every three months. You will have STI screening, blood tests for HIV and other tests to see if your body is reacting well to the medication. You will also receive information about how to reduce your risk of acquiring HIV and STI.

## How frequently do I need to take PrEP?

You should take PrEP as prescribed by your doctor. Your doctor will advise you about ways to help you remember to take PrEP regularly. Tell your doctor if you are having trouble remembering to take your medicine or if you want to stop taking PrEP.

## Is taking PrEP 'on-demand' instead of every day effective?

Daily HIV PrEP, when taken every day as prescribed, is a highly effective HIV prevention strategy for MSM, heterosexual men and women, transgender people, and people who inject drugs who are at risk of HIV acquisition.

PrEP is also recommended as a highly effective HIV prevention strategy for MSM when taken 'on-demand', sometimes known as event based dosing. This type of dosing is only recommended for cisgender MSM who can plan or delay their sexual activity according to their PrEP dosing schedule. On-demand PrEP can be suitable for those who have sex without condoms infrequently, for a short period of time (e.g. while travelling) or who experience side effects from daily PrEP.

On-demand PrEP is not suitable for anyone with chronic hepatitis B infection.

It is important to speak with your doctor about the best dosing schedule for your circumstances.

## How long do I need to be on PrEP?

You should keep taking PrEP for as long as you continue to be at medium to high risk for HIV, in consultation with your doctor. There are several reasons that people stop taking PrEP. If your risk of HIV infection becomes low because of changes in your life, you may want to stop taking PrEP. If you find that you do not want to take a pill every day or that you often forget to take your pills, other ways of protecting yourself from HIV infection may work better for you. If you have side effects from the medication that are interfering with your life, or if blood tests show that your body is reacting to PrEP in unsafe ways, your doctor may have to stop prescribing PrEP for you. You should discuss this with your doctor.

## How will I pay for PrEP?

If **you have a Medicare card** and a prescription, PrEP medication can be purchased for a discounted rate at pharmacies in Australia as it is listed on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). You will have to pay a PBS co-payment, as with all other medications on the PBS. Co-payments are financial contributions made by PBS eligible consumers towards the cost of dispensing medication.

The PBS classifies people into two categories for the purposes of co-payments: concessional patients or general patients. Concessional patients are individuals with a Health Care Card or Pensioner Concession Card. Concessional patients will pay a PBS co-payment of \$6.40 for 30-days' supply of PrEP while general patients will pay a co-payment of \$39.50 for 30-days' supply.

If you **do not** have a Medicare card, check out [www.PAN.org.au](http://www.PAN.org.au) for useful information about access to PrEP, including buying PrEP medication online.

Once your doctor has confirmed that it is safe to start PrEP, you will receive a prescription that should be filled within seven days. It is important to start taking the PrEP medication as soon as your prescription has been filled. Note that some pharmacies may need to order the medication which may take a few days.

## Are there alternatives to PrEP?

Depending on your HIV risk factors, other HIV prevention methods like condoms, post exposure prophylaxis (PEP) or other safe sex strategies may be more suitable for you. Discuss your options with your doctor.

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## For more information

### Adelaide Sexual Health Centre

1st Floor, 275 North Terrace, Adelaide, South Australia

Telephone: (08) 7117 2800 or 1800 806 490 (SA regional callers only)

[www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/adelaidesexualhealthcentre](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/adelaidesexualhealthcentre) | [www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/HIVPREP](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/HIVPREP)

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