

PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS (PrEP) Questions & Answers for Community-Based Organizations

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is a drug to stop HIV.¹ Side effects of the drug are minor or slight.¹ Yet, some people worry about using PrEP. This document includes common questions clients may ask you about PrEP with suggested responses.



What is PrEP? How does it work?

PrEP is a drug you take daily if you are at high risk for HIV to lower your chances of getting infected. The letters in PrEP stand for:

- Pr:** Pre
- E:** Exposure
- P:** Prophylaxis – treatment to stop an infection or disease

If you take PrEP every day, the drugs can stop HIV from taking hold if you are exposed to the virus. Studies have shown that PrEP reduces the risk of getting HIV from sex by more than 90% when used consistently.²

The drugs in PrEP are some of the same ones used to treat people living with HIV. Truvada, which is a combination of two drugs (tenofovir and emtricitabine) in one pill, is the only drug approved for PrEP right now.



What does it really mean to be on PrEP?

Being on PrEP means taking a pill every day and going to your doctor every two to three months for check-ups. During the check-ups, you will have blood drawn for lab work. You will also be tested for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). The check-ups will help make sure that PrEP is safe for you and you are not experiencing any negative side effects.



Who should consider PrEP?

Anyone who is currently HIV-negative, but at substantial risk of being exposed to the virus, should consider taking PrEP. CDC recommends that the following people consider using PrEP:

- Anyone in an ongoing sexual relationship with an HIV-positive partner
- Gay, bisexual, or other men who have sex with men (MSM) who have had anal sex without a condom (outside of a mutually monogamous relationship) or been diagnosed with a STI in the past six (6) months
- Heterosexual men or women who do not regularly use condoms during sex with partners of unknown HIV status who are at substantial risk of HIV infection (e.g., people who inject drugs or have bisexual male partners)
- Those who have injected drugs in the past six (6) months and who have shared injection equipment or been in drug treatment for injection drug use in the past six (6) months.

¹ www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/prep.html

² www.cdc.gov/hiv/risk/estimates/preventionstrategies.html



Are there any side effects to taking PrEP?

Studies have shown that some PrEP users have minor side effects, such as nausea, stomachaches, loss of appetite, and/or headaches. More serious side effects include swelling and liver problems. In most people, the side effects go away after a while. Anyone thinking about using PrEP should talk to a doctor about the possible side effects.



I know I am supposed to take PrEP every day, but what happens if I miss a day?

PrEP should be taken every day to work well. Some recent studies have shown that taking PrEP as many as four (4) times in a week can also help prevent HIV.

PrEP is **not** recommended for people who cannot take a pill every day. PrEP will not work if you only use it every once in a while.



Where can I get PrEP or more information?

Talk to your doctor about whether PrEP is the right HIV prevention strategy for you. Your doctor can help you make an informed decision about the possible risks and benefits of taking PrEP.

If you do not have a primary care physician or you are not comfortable talking to your doctor about PrEP, a local AIDS service organization, community-based organization, or health department could give you more information where to get PrEP.



I do not feel comfortable talking to my doctor about PrEP. Who else can I talk to?

Some doctors may not know how to talk about PrEP because they may not have the most current information. Some doctors may not be comfortable talking about anal sex. Other doctors may have strong thoughts about what they see as “non-traditional” relationships.

In these cases, you may want to ask your doctor for a referral to another provider who knows more about PrEP and has experience with patients from various backgrounds.



Does PrEP help stop other STIs like syphilis or gonorrhea? What about pregnancy?

PrEP does not prevent other STIs or pregnancy. If you are concerned about getting STIs, you may want to consider using condoms and PrEP together.

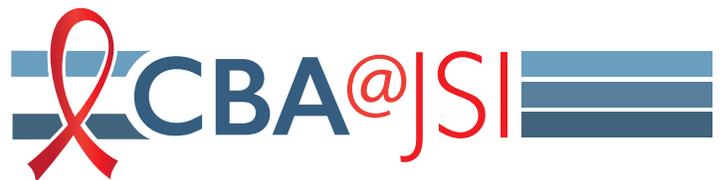
Condoms can help prevent pregnancy, too. Partners should talk to their doctor about condoms and other birth control or family planning options.



How much does PrEP cost? How can I get help to pay for it?

PrEP can cost as much as \$13,000 per year. If you have health insurance or Medicaid, it may help pay for all or some of the cost of PrEP. You may have to pay a co-pay for PrEP. A co-pay is the amount of money you pay when you get a drug or health care service.

Programs such as the Gilead HIV Co-pay Coupon Card can help you with PrEP co-pays. Gilead also sponsors the Partnership for Prescription Assistance (PPA) Program, which can help people without insurance pay for PrEP. For more information, visit www.gileadadvancingaccess.com/financial-support.



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