

Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)

Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) is when a person who is HIV-negative and at risk of contracting HIV takes a medication to decrease their risk of becoming HIV-positive.

Who would qualify for Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)?

PrEP can be used by people who are at risk of contracting HIV.

This includes **men or transgender women who have sex with men, people who engage in sex work, and intravenous (IV) drug users** who have one of the following risk factors:

- Condomless vaginal or anal sex
- A sexual partner with one or more HIV risk factors
- A history of a STI in the past six months

PrEP can also be used by someone who has a sexual partner who is HIV-positive and who is not virally suppressed on medication.

What PrEP medications are available and how much does it cost?

Two medications are available in Canada.

- **Emtricitabine/tenofovir (Truvada)**
 - Currently generic Truvada is free for people covered under the provincial drug plans listed below:
 - OHIP+ (Ontario residents who are 24 years old and under)
 - ODSP (Ontario Disability Support Program)
 - Ontario Works
 - Trillium (after the yearly deductible is met)
 - Generic Truvada is covered by most private insurance drug plans. Without a drug plan, the monthly cost varies from \$240-290 depending on your pharmacy.
- **Emtricitabine and tenofovir alafenamide (Descovy)**
 - **Descovy** is covered by some insurance plans and is not available in generic form at this time. It contains a different formulation of the tenofovir medication in Truvada, and has decreased risks of kidney and bone side effects. It has been evaluated in one study and performed similarly to Truvada, however, it has only been studied in men who have sex with men (MSM). It is more expensive, with an estimated monthly cost of \$1,000.

How effective is PrEP in preventing HIV infections?

PrEP can reduce the risk of contracting HIV-1 by more than 90 percent in people who take their medication as prescribed. Rare infections may still occur. It is important to take the medication **once daily as prescribed. Compliance is important.**

What about protection from other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs)?

PrEP does not protect against other STIs such as chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, or hepatitis.

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What are the safety concerns with PrEP?

Side effects of Truvada:

- Nausea (between 1-10% chance)
- Vomiting (between 1-10% chance)
- Diarrhea (between 1-10% chance)
- Headache (between 1-10% chance)
- Dizziness (between 1-10% chance)

Small decreases in kidney, liver, and bone health; these changes reversed in patients who stopped taking Truvada. Side effects may decrease with continued therapy.

Potential drug resistance:

If a person is HIV-positive when starting Truvada or contracts HIV while on Truvada, other HIV medications will need to be used for treatment due to potential drug resistance. For the same reason persons taking PrEP should have regular HIV testing every 3 months.

What are the steps to getting PrEP?

The first step to getting a prescription for PrEP is to visit your healthcare provider or visit the STI clinic. Your healthcare provider will then take a full medical history and ask questions about any medications you are on or allergies you may have.

The next step is bloodwork to ensure that you are HIV negative. Your healthcare provider or STI physician will also order bloodwork to check your kidney and liver function. Additionally, you will be screened for other STIs including chlamydia, gonorrhea, syphilis, and hepatitis.

Once your bloodwork has come back and is normal, your healthcare provider will send a prescription to the pharmacy for one month's supply of medication or you can review your results and pick up your prescription. You will have to revisit your healthcare provider after one month to ensure that you are tolerating the medication and to have your bloodwork repeated. At that time, your healthcare provider may give you a prescription for three more months.

How often will I need to follow up with my healthcare provider?

You will need to make an appointment with your healthcare provider or attend the STI clinic one month after starting PrEP. Afterwards you will need to make an appointment with your healthcare provider or attend the STI clinic every three months for bloodwork.

How long until PrEP becomes effective? What happens if I miss a dose? If I want to stop, how long do I have to wait after I engaged in unprotected sex?

The latest studies show that it takes seven days for PrEP to become effective for receptive anal sex and twenty days for receptive vaginal sex/injection drug use. If you miss a dose, do NOT take two doses the next day. Efficacy may decrease with missed doses. Talk to your healthcare provider if you wish to stop PrEP and have recently had unprotected sex.

For more information, please contact us at 619-663-5317 and ask for Sexual Health