

PEP 101

PEP Basics

PEP stands for **Post-Exposure Prophylaxis**

PEP means taking medication after you may have been exposed to HIV to prevent transmission.



The word “prophylaxis” means to control or prevent the spread of an infection or disease.

People are exposed to HIV by coming into contact with certain body fluids of a person with HIV, including blood, semen, and vaginal fluids. This usually happens through anal or vaginal sex or by sharing needles.



PEP IS FOR EMERGENCY USE

If you may have been exposed to HIV in the last 72 hours, talk to your healthcare provider, an emergency room doctor, or your local health department about PEP right away.

How Does PEP Work?



PEP must be started **within 72 hours (3 days)** after you may have been exposed to HIV. But the sooner you start PEP, the better. Every hour counts.

PEP is effective in preventing HIV after possible exposure, but not 100%. Use condoms with sex partners and use safe injection practices.



PEP may help the body’s immune system stop the virus from being copied in the infected cells of the body. The infected cells would then die naturally within a short period of time without producing more copies of HIV.



Can I take PEP every time I have sex without a condom?



No, PEP should be used only in emergency situations.



If you are at risk for HIV, ask your healthcare provider about Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis, also known as PrEP, which is a medication you take every day to prevent HIV.

For more information about PrEP, visit cdc.gov/StopHIVTogether/Prevention.

Is PEP Right For Me?

How Do I Know If I Need PEP?

If you are HIV-negative or don’t know your HIV status, and in the last 72 hours you...

may have been exposed to HIV during sex, for example, if the condom broke

or shared needles or works to prepare drugs

or were sexually assaulted

...talk to your healthcare provider, an emergency room doctor, or local health department about starting PEP right away.



What Should I Expect While I’m Taking PEP?



Your healthcare provider will test you for HIV before prescribing PEP. They may test you again six months after you begin taking PEP to make sure you stay HIV-negative. It takes time for an HIV test to show that a person has HIV.

If your healthcare provider prescribes PEP, you’ll need to take it daily for 28 days.



Tell your healthcare provider if you have trouble remembering to take your pills or want to stop PEP treatment.

It’s important you follow your healthcare provider’s advice about how to take your pills. This will give you the best chance to prevent HIV.



SIDE EFFECTS

PEP is safe, but it may cause side effects like upset stomach and fatigue in some people. These side effects can be treated and are not life-threatening.

You should immediately tell your healthcare provider if these or other symptoms become severe or do not go away.



PEP Access

How Do I Get PEP?



You can talk to your healthcare provider (in person or through telehealth), or visit an emergency room, urgent care, or health department to be prescribed PEP. **Act right away if you think you’ve recently been exposed to HIV.**

How Do I Pay for PEP?



If you are prescribed PEP after a sexual assault, you may qualify for partial or total reimbursement for medicines and clinical care costs through the Office for Victims of Crime, funded by the U.S. Department of Justice. More information is available at ovc.ojp.gov.

If you are prescribed PEP and you cannot get insurance coverage (Medicaid, Medicare, private, or employer-based), your healthcare provider can apply for free PEP medicine through the medication assistance programs run by the manufacturers.



What Happens if PEP Doesn’t Work and I Contract HIV?

PEP is highly effective in preventing HIV, but if it doesn’t work and you get HIV, the most important step is to get into care and start HIV treatment.



LEARN MORE

For more information about HIV treatment, visit cdc.gov/StopHIVTogether/Treatment.

For more information about PEP, visit cdc.gov/HIV/Basics/Pep.html.

Getting and staying on treatment will help you manage your HIV better and can keep you healthy for many years.



YOU ARE IN CONTROL

GET INFORMED

MAKE THE RIGHT
CHOICE FOR YOU



DO YOU KNOW ABOUT PEP?

LEARN MORE ABOUT
PEP



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Ending
the
HIV
Epidemic