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PEPFAR
U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief

AIDS Free
Strengthening High Impact Interventions
for an AIDS-free Generation

Frequently Asked Questions on PrEP



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Q. What is PrEP?

A. PrEP, or pre-exposure prophylaxis, is an HIV prevention medicine that comes in the form of a pill taken daily. It is highly effective against HIV when taken every day.

Q. How well does PrEP work?

A. PrEP is very effective when it is taken correctly and consistently. HIV-negative people who take PrEP every day can lower their risk of HIV infection by more than 90 percent.

Q. How often do I need to take PrEP?

A. You need to take it once a day at more or less the same time.

Q. Is PrEP safe?

A. PrEP has been shown to be very safe.

Q. Will I have to take PrEP for the rest of my life?

A. No, PrEP is not taken for life—it is only taken for short periods when a person may be at high risk of HIV infection. Your level of risk may vary during different periods of your life as circumstances change.

Q. If I take PrEP, do I still need to use condoms?

A. Yes, you should still use condoms. Condoms protect against other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and prevent pregnancy. It is essential to use condoms during the first seven (7) days—the time it takes for PrEP to start working in your body. It is highly recommended that you continue to use condoms even after this period.

Q. Is PrEP for me?

A. Taking a pill every day for ongoing HIV prevention might not be for everybody, but it is an excellent option for people at high risk of getting HIV. Most people can use PrEP safely, but a health care provider will need to determine if there is any reason why you should not take it.

Q. What happens if I miss a pill?

A. If you missed a pill, take it as soon as you remember, and continue to take it daily as before.

Q. Where can I get PrEP?

A. You can get PrEP from any government clinics or hospital that is offering HIV treatment services. In addition, you can access medicines for PrEP from community pharmacies after you have done the tests that confirm you to be eligible for PrEP.

Q. Can I use PrEP and contraception (i.e., birth control pills, Depo-Provera) together?

A. Yes, PrEP can be taken safely with any kind of contraception.

Q. Does PrEP have side effects?

A. Some people get mild side effects when they start PrEP (about 1 in 10 people). The most common ones include nausea, headache, tiredness, and dizziness. In most people, these side effects go away after a few days or weeks. Your health care provider can help you to manage any side effects. Taking the pill with food, for example, can reduce the nausea.

Q. Can I get HIV from taking PrEP?

A. No, you cannot get HIV from taking PrEP. The medications in PrEP work to prevent HIV.

Q. What is the difference between PEP and PrEP?

A. PEP—post-exposure prophylaxis—is taken within 72 hours after exposure to HIV for 28 days to prevent HIV. PrEP is a pill taken daily before exposure to prevent HIV.

Q. Can I share my PrEP with others who need it?

A. No, PrEP must never be shared. You must take one pill a day for PrEP to work, and there will only be enough pills for you. Note that PrEP should never be given to someone with HIV as it would not be enough to treat them and could cause them harm.

Q. Will I have to pay for PrEP at the clinic?

A. No, you will not be asked for payment.

Q. During the period when I use PrEP as a prevention option, do I still need to take other precautions against HIV infection?

A. Yes, PrEP is an additional HIV prevention choice and the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends using it together with condoms, which will also protect against other STIs. PrEP does not protect against other STIs.

Q. What are the health implications for a healthy, HIV-negative individual taking PrEP?

A. The drug that is currently used for PrEP has already been extensively used for the treatment of HIV infection and there are now many people around the world using it as PrEP. Its safety profile is well documented, and it is considered a safe drug to use. All drugs, however, can have some side effects, even if these are minor or rare, and this also applies to the drug used for PrEP. This is why PrEP should be provided in a clinical setting where its safety can be monitored and where, should a problem occur, corrective action can be taken.

Q. Can I stop using PrEP once I am no longer exposed to risk of HIV?

A. Even if you are no longer exposed to risk of HIV while taking PrEP, you should still continue taking the medicine for 28 days after the exposure to HIV ends. This is essential to maintain the protective effect of PrEP.

Q. How soon do I benefit from PrEP once I start taking it?

A. It takes about seven (7) days of administration before you become protected. Therefore, you must use other prevention methods, such as consistent use of condoms during the first 7 days to ensure total protection from day 1.

Q. Are there tests that must be conducted before I can take PrEP?

A. Yes, there are tests that must be conducted before you can take PrEP. The first test is to confirm that you are HIV-negative through a rapid HIV test. There are other tests that are required to confirm if you have Hepatitis B and to establish the state of your kidney, but you can usually start PrEP before getting the results of these last two tests.

Q. Can I drink alcohol while taking PrEP?

A. There are no known interactions between PrEP medicines and alcohol. However, drinking too much may lead you to forget to take your medicine on time. In this case, it is usually best to take your pill before you start drinking.

Q. How can I remember to take a pill every day?

A. Try to choose a time that fits your daily routine—for example taking the tablet after brushing your teeth each morning. Or, if you have a mobile phone, you could set a reminder on the phone at the time you plan to take your tablet.

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