

# PrEP to Prevent HIV: Everything you need to know

HIV PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis) is medicine that reduces the risk of HIV infection if you are exposed. If you are at risk of becoming infected with HIV, it can be an important part of your sexual health care. If you inject drugs, it can be an important part of your safer drug-use practices. It works very well and is very safe if used as prescribed. PrEP is available as a daily oral medication (pill) or as a once-a-month injection (shot). Talk openly with your providers about your sexual and/or drug-use practices, your HIV risks, and your ability to take PrEP regularly—it's the only way they can determine if PrEP is likely to work for you, and it's the best way to identify the right tools to keep you healthy.

## Who should consider taking PrEP?

Consider PrEP if you are a sexually active man who has sex with men, a heterosexual person, a transgender person, or a person who injects drugs, AND you have one or more of the risk factors for HIV listed below. Significant risks for HIV infection include:

- Using condoms only sometimes or not at all
- Having more than one sex partner
- Having a sex partner(s) who has HIV
- Having had a recent sexually transmitted infection (STI), such as gonorrhea, chlamydia, or syphilis
- Having an injecting partner(s) who has HIV
- Sharing injection equipment
- Engaging in sex work
- Using stimulants, poppers, cocaine, meth, ecstasy, or GHB, especially with sex, in the past year
- Having taken post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) to prevent HIV in the past year

As you can see, a lot of people have risks for HIV infection. If you have even one of these risks, please discuss PrEP with your VA provider.



## Before PrEP

Your health care providers will discuss PrEP with you and do lab tests to figure out if PrEP is appropriate for you. Here are some of the things they will do before PrEP can be prescribed:

- Discuss your sexual practices (sexual health history), injection drug-use practices, and your risks of HIV and other STIs; counsel you about reducing these risks
- Discuss your pregnancy intentions. For people who can get pregnant, do a pregnancy test
- Test for HIV
- Test for kidney problems, hepatitis B, and sexually transmitted infections
- Advise you about the PrEP medications, including:
  - » possible side effects and what to do if you get them
  - » the importance of taking PrEP every day for the daily medication or importance of making your monthly appointment for the injectable PrEP
  - » symptoms of acute HIV infection
  - » the frequency of follow-up visits

## During PrEP

Always take your medication as prescribed. It is important to stay on top of your prescription and make sure that you do not run out. The patient portal (MyHealthVet or MyVAHealth) is a helpful tool to monitor your prescription status, make sure you have your upcoming appointments scheduled (including injections for injectable PrEP), and more! It is also very important that you contact your provider if you develop:

- Symptoms that could signal that you have developed acute HIV infection—these include flu-like symptoms and rash
- Side effects. Truvada® and Descovy® are the medications used for daily oral PrEP. They do not usually cause bothersome side effects. Some people experience nausea, diarrhea, or headache when they first start it; usually these symptoms get better within a couple of weeks. Your provider will tell you about other uncommon side effects. It may take 1-3 weeks for the medication to become fully effective. For injectable PrEP, side effects may include injection site soreness.

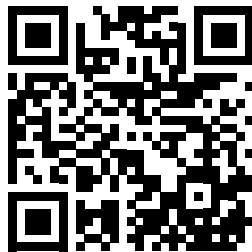
You will have clinic visits and/or lab work at least every 3 months. Your provider will evaluate your HIV risks, test you for HIV and STIs, do a pregnancy test (if indicated) evaluate side effects, etc.

## Stopping PrEP

If you would like to stop taking PrEP, try to discuss this in advance with your provider to ensure your safety. In general, we recommend continuing PrEP for 4 weeks after your most recent sexual exposure.

## Resources

For more information on PrEP and VA, visit:



[www.hiv.va.gov](http://www.hiv.va.gov)

## Additional Resources

U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention ([http:// www.cdc.gov/hiv/risk/prep/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/risk/prep/index.html))

HIV.gov ([www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics/hiv-prevention/using-hiv-medication-to-reduce-risk/pre-exposureprophylaxis](http://www.hiv.gov/hiv-basics/hiv-prevention/using-hiv-medication-to-reduce-risk/pre-exposureprophylaxis))

If you are not eligible for VA care or have a non-Veteran partner who might need assistance getting PrEP, please see the national Ready, Set, PrEP donation program ([www.getyourprep.com/](http://www.getyourprep.com/))