

## PrEP Pharmacy Project: Online Resource V1.5

### Introduction:

PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) is a new way to protect yourself from HIV infection. This information aims to help explain more about what PrEP is, how you take it and what to do if you would like to start taking PrEP.

### This information covers:

- What PrEP is.
- How PrEP is taken.
- Why PrEP could be for you.
- What is useful to know when considering PrEP.
- PrEP for women.
- PrEP for men.
- How to access PrEP.
- Who needs to know you are on PrEP and what you could do if someone finds your tablets.

### A word about some of the words/terms used in the information:

**Men and Women/Male and Female:** includes both cisgender (people whose gender identity matches the one they were assigned at birth) and trans/transgender (people whose gender identity is different from the one they were assigned at birth) that may identify as male or female.

**Vaginal and Frontal sex:** Frontal sex is the preferred term for many trans men, especially when they have not had lower surgery. Whenever vaginal sex is mentioned this includes frontal sex.

**Neo-vagina:** a vagina constructed during elective transition surgery for trans women.

### What is PrEP?

PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) is a pill that is taken by HIV negative people on a regular basis before and after sex that reduces the risk of getting HIV through sex with an infectious partner.

The tablet that is taken is usually a generic version of Truvada, which is one of the drugs taken by HIV positive people to treat their infection. HIV positive people on treatment can become uninfected if they take the drugs as advised. This means that they can't pass on HIV to their sexual partners. If your partner/s are on HIV treatments and the level of virus in their body is at a level that is known as 'undetectable' that means there isn't enough virus in their bodies to be detected by a test and therefore there is not enough virus to infect someone else, which means you don't need to take PrEP.

If taken correctly, PrEP offers almost 100% protection against HIV infection, for both men and women, and for vaginal and anal sex.

PrEP ISN'T PEP – PrEP is taken before possible contact with HIV and PEP (or post exposure prophylaxis) is taken AFTER possible contact with HIV. PEP has to be taken up to 72 hours after possible contact with HIV. There is more information about PEP at <https://www.tht.org.uk/hiv-and-sexual-health/pep-post-exposure-prophylaxis-hiv>

Although PrEP offers almost 100% protection against HIV it doesn't protect you against other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). You should stay aware of how to recognise your symptoms and seek help

if you believe you have been exposed to an STI. Condoms offer a high level of protection against many STIs as they act as a barrier between the person who is infected and their partner. It is important to remember that condoms are not 100% effective as many STIs can be passed between partners by skin to skin contact and on fingers.

## **Why PrEP?**

PrEP offers men and women (including trans men and trans women) almost 100% protection against HIV when taken correctly.

PrEP offers protection for both vaginal, frontal and anal sex.

PrEP can be easily added to your daily routine, especially if you are used to taking hormonal contraception or other medication on a regular basis. Even if you don't currently take medications regularly, there are easily followed ways to remember to take your PrEP.

Data about new HIV infections in 2019 shows that where ethnicity is known:

- 44% of people newly diagnosed with HIV were not of white ethnicity
- 68% of females newly diagnosed with HIV were not of white ethnicity
- 60% of heterosexuals newly diagnosed with HIV were not of white ethnicity
- 28% of gay men and other men who have sex with men (MSM) were not of white ethnicity

In a study about PrEP, 0 (zero) % of the Black Africans in the study used condoms 'always', and 53% 'never' used condoms.

Black African women in the study were the most likely to never use a condom, yet were the most likely to have a sexual partner who is part of a community/group experiences high levels of HIV.

100% of Black African participants in the study did not know the HIV status of their sexual partner/s.

PrEP would be of great benefit in all of these instances.

## **PrEP could be for you if:**

- Condoms are not easy for you to use, or are not always used when you have sex.
- You've recently been diagnosed with, or in the past year have had a vaginal, frontal or rectal STI.
- You were given PEP recently because you were in contact with HIV via sex.
- You have sexual partners whose HIV status you don't know.
- You have sexual partners who are HIV positive and are not currently 'uninfectious' – they are still able to pass on HIV even though they may be on treatments for it.
- You have sexual partners who are from the communities that are highly impacted by HIV.
- You have sex whilst out of the UK in places where there are high levels of HIV infection in the population.

PrEP would be of great benefit to you in any of these instances.

## **Before you take PrEP**

If you would like to start taking PrEP it is important to know a couple of things:

You will be asked to take an HIV test to make sure that you are HIV negative. PrEP is only of benefit if you are HIV negative.

You will be asked to take a full range of tests for STIs including Hepatitis B and C.

If you have active Hepatitis B infection then the doctor will discuss treatment options for that infection with you as well as taking this into consideration when prescribing you PrEP.

If you test positive for Hepatitis C you will be recommended a course of a drug called Sofosbuvir, which will cure the infection. You can take this drug at the same time as starting PrEP.

You will also be asked to take a kidney function test on a regular basis, to ensure that the drugs in PrEP do not affect your kidneys functioning properly.

Most of these will be blood tests, with the blood for the tests being taken at the same time.

### **Eligibility:**

PrEP is available to people from communities with the greatest risk of acquiring HIV, who test HIV negative, and report episodes of condomless sex with a partner of either unknown HIV status or a partner who is HIV positive and does not currently have an undetectable viral load.

### **Positive HIV test?**

If you test positive for HIV, remember you can live a long healthy life. You will be offered both support and information alongside the offer to start treatments to control the HIV and bring the level of virus in your body down to undetectable levels, to both ensure you stay healthy and that you can't pass HIV on.

If you are concerned about taking a test at the clinic you can access a self-testing or self-sampling kit to test at home before you go to the clinic. If you choose to do this you will still be asked to take a test to confirm that the result is correct. HIV tests at clinics are more sensitive and will be better able to pick up if you have been recently infected than the home kit. Think of the self-test kits like pregnancy tests – they give you an idea about the result and it still needs to be confirmed with a doctors test. [link to THT self-test kits portal here?](#)

<https://prepster.info/category/my-prep-story/>

<https://www.prepimpacttrial.org.uk/awareness>

<https://www.womenandprep.org.uk>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCtcrwliT4Dhsdyv-CpSloYQ>

### **PrEP for Women**

'One tablet a day' for vaginal / frontal and anal sex

#### **Taking PrEP if you have vaginal / frontal sex:**

You will need to take a daily dose of the tablet you are given to make sure that the drug both builds up to and then remains at a level in your body to offer you protection from HIV.

As it takes 7 days for the drugs to reach this protective level in your body, if you have sex you will need to continue to use any other protective measures against HIV (like condoms) that you may be currently using. After these first 7 days you can decide to stop using other measures.

You need to continue to take one tablet a day for as long as you want PrEP to be the thing you use to protect you against HIV infection.

This is the same for women who are assigned female at birth and trans women who have neo-vaginal sex.

## **Missing a dose**

If a person accidentally misses a dose of PrEP the advice is to take that dose as soon as you remember and then continue with your doses as normal. Missing a dose is different from deciding to stop for longer than a day or two, or stopping permanently.

## **Stopping PrEP; either temporarily or permanently**

You can decide to stop taking PrEP at any time you want to, however you must keep taking the pills for 7 days after the last time you had condomless sex or your last risk of being exposed to HIV, so that the level of drugs remain high enough to protect you until the risk from this exposure has gone. It's probably easier just to take the pill for the 7 days after the last time you had sex.

## **Starting PrEP again if you stopped taking it.**

You can choose to start taking PrEP again when you want to and when you are ready to, although you will have to repeat the same process as when you start taking PrEP for the first time:

- Taking an HIV test to make sure you are still HIV negative
- Taking the full range of tests for STI's, including Hepatitis B and C.
- Taking a Kidney Function test
- Taking the daily dose for 7 days to allow the levels of the drug to build up to protective levels before you rely on PrEP only to protect you from HIV.

## **Contraceptives, getting pregnant, breastfeeding and taking hormones**

Some women have expressed concerns about how PrEP could affect hormonal birth control ("the Pill") or if it's ok to get pregnant or breastfeed if you are taking PrEP.

When on PrEP you can:

Take "the Pill" – it's safe and the two drugs do not affect each other. PrEP won't stop the hormonal birth control pill working. Both will work well if you take them correctly.

Get pregnant (if that's what you are trying to do): PrEP stops HIV infection not conception. If you are trying to get pregnant it's OK to conceive and carry a baby, PrEP is safe for you both. Of course, if you don't want to get pregnant you will have to carry on using your preferred method of contraception.

Breastfeed: If you want to start or indeed carry on breastfeeding a baby it is perfectly safe to do so while you are taking PrEP.

Take feminising hormone therapy: PrEP will not stop the hormones working, or cause fat redistribution in your face or body.

## **Does PrEP interact with or affect any other medicines I might be taking?**

PrEP does not interact with most other medications and you can take PrEP and continue to drink alcohol or use recreational drugs. PrEP doesn't interact or affect the hormonal birth control pill or most 'over the counter' medicines like aspirin, although it can interact with drugs known as NSAIDS or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. These include Ibuprofen, Diclofenac and Naproxen.

If you are using PrEP, other drugs to these NSAIDS will be prescribed by your GP/doctor and suggested by your pharmacist when you are buying 'over the counter' drugs in the pharmacy. The reason they shouldn't be taken is they put added pressure on your kidney function as both PrEP and these drugs are processed by the kidneys. This is the reason you are asked to take regular kidney function tests, to check that they are not being affected. There are also other drugs used to treat kidney function issues that may be affected by PrEP and again, it is best if you talk with your doctor and pharmacist about this if you are being treated for kidney issues.

If you are concerned about PrEP affecting any other medications you may be taking, it's important to talk with your GP, the doctor/s you see when getting PrEP or your pharmacist.

Liverpool University have a useful online resource [[www.hiv-druginteractions.org](http://www.hiv-druginteractions.org)] which allows you to look up and check on any interactions between PrEP and other medications you may be taking.

## **PrEP for Men**

### **Daily dosing or On Demand dosing – what could work for you?**

This information will be relevant for you if you have sex with women or men or with both.

#### **Daily Dosing: Take one pill every day.**

Although it would probably be best to take PrEP (one pill) every day for 7 days to allow the drug to build up in your body, you can use the Events Based or 4 day dosing routine as this offers protection after 2 hours of taking the pills.

Daily PrEP is recommended for trans men.

#### **Event Based or On Demand Dosing, also known as 4 Day Dosing:**

This is as effective as daily dosing for men, and is mainly for men who do not like taking pills daily, or are not having sex daily or on a known and regular basis.

If you think you may be having sex and don't like or don't want to use a condom, the routine is:

Dose One: Take **2** pills between 2 and 24 hours before you have sex. It can't be any less than 2 hours before as the drug won't be at levels that will protect you from HIV, or more than 24 hours before, as the drug will have left your system, unless you are Daily Dosing.

Dose Two: Take **1** pill 24 hours after you took Dose One.

Dose Three: Take **1** more pill 24 hours after Dose Two.

Event or On Demand Dosing can also be known as the 'T's and S's' routine. Take 1 pill on Tuesdays, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays, making it easier to fit into your own routines.

#### **Missing a dose**

If a person accidentally misses a dose of PrEP the advice is to take that dose as soon as you remember and then continue with your doses as normal. Missing a dose is different from deciding to stop for longer than a day or two, or stopping permanently.

#### **Does PrEP interact with or affect any other medicines I might be taking?**

PrEP does not interact with most other medications and you can take PrEP and continue to drink alcohol or use recreational drugs. PrEP doesn't interact or affect most 'over the counter' medicines like aspirin, although it can interact with drugs known as NSAIDs or non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs. These include Ibuprofen, Diclofenac and Naproxen.

If you are using PrEP, other drugs to these NSAIDs will be prescribed by your GP/doctor and suggested by your pharmacist when you are buying 'over the counter' drugs in the pharmacy. The reason they shouldn't be taken is they put added pressure on your kidney function as both PrEP and these drugs are processed by the kidneys. This is the reason you are asked to take regular kidney function tests, to check that they are not being affected. There are also other drugs used to treat kidney function issues that may be affected by PrEP and again, it is best if you talk with your doctors and pharmacists if you are being treated for kidney issues.

If you are concerned about PrEP affecting any other medications you may be taking, it's important to talk with your GP, the doctor/s you see when getting PrEP or your pharmacist.

Liverpool University have a useful online resource [[www.hiv-druginteractions.org](http://www.hiv-druginteractions.org)] which allows you to look up and check on any interactions between PrEP and other medications you may be taking.

## **Stopping PrEP; either temporarily or permanently**

You can decide to stop taking PrEP at any time you want to, however you must keep taking the pills for 7 days after the last time you had condomless sex or your last risk of being exposed to HIV, so that the level of drugs remain high enough to protect you until the risk from this exposure has gone.

## **Starting PrEP again if you stopped taking it.**

You can choose to start taking PrEP again when you want to and are ready to. If you have completely stopped taking PrEP for longer than 7 days and want to start taking it again it's important to repeat the same process as when you start taking PrEP for the first time:

- Taking an HIV test to make sure you are still HIV negative.
- Taking the full range of tests for STI's, including Hepatitis B and C.
- Taking a Hepatitis B test to make sure you do not have active infection.
- Taking a Kidney Function test.
- Taking the daily dose for 7 days or use the Events Based or 4 Day Dosing routines to allow the levels of the drug to build up to protective levels before you rely on PrEP only to protect you from HIV.

## **How to access PrEP**

PrEP is available for free from your local sexual health clinic. If you are unsure where your local clinic is, or would like to use a clinic that isn't local to you, your pharmacist may be able to give you this information or you can check online at:

<https://prepster.info/free-prep-uk/>

<https://www.better2know.co.uk/clinics/city/london/>

## **Who needs to know that I'm taking PrEP?**

Only you and the people that are helping you to access it, like your doctor and pharmacist.

If you choose to let your sexual partner/s know that you are now using PrEP to protect yourself against possible HIV infection that is your choice, although if you feel able to it is always good to be as open as you can be with your partner/s.

If you have previously been using condoms when having sex with your partners it is probably best to explain why you may not be using them from now on, for as long as you are using PrEP as your protection against HIV.

Many people on PrEP continue to use condoms as well because of the added protection they give against STIs, and some people stop using condoms altogether. It's a personal choice for you to make.

Remember, it's your body, your choice, your sexual health.

## **What do I do if someone finds my supply of PrEP?**

The answer to this is dependent on your relationship with that person and if they need to know and what they need to know. Remember the decision is yours, not theirs.

Many people are concerned that if a partner finds out that they are taking PrEP it means that you think they are putting you at risk of HIV infection, with all of the stigma about HIV that this may bring. What you are actually doing is looking after yourself and your health, you are not making a judgement about them, whether they are HIV positive or not. PrEP is a tool to protect yourself against possible HIV infection from someone who may not know what their HIV status is.

People also have concerns that partners and/or others will think that you are taking PrEP because you are sexually promiscuous or are a sex worker. PrEP is a way to take care of yourself and to reduce your risk of becoming infected with HIV to almost 0%. That's all it is. Unfortunately there can be stigma attached to having sex and sex work that makes people uncomfortable with the idea that people make decisions to protect themselves.

Your choice to use PrEP says nothing more than you want the sex you have to be as safe as it can be.

That is being respectful to, and responsible for yourself.