

## The Basics of PrEP

### 1. What is PrEP?

- PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) is medicine used to prevent getting Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) from sex or injection drug use.
- The medicine is highly effective when taken consistently as prescribed.

### 2. Who Should Consider Taking PrEP?

- If you are HIV negative and have a partner who is HIV positive, you can consider taking PrEP. PrEP may also be right for you if you have had anal or vaginal sex in the past 6 months and:
  - Have a sexual partner with HIV or unknown status; or
  - Have not consistently used a condom; or
  - Have been diagnosed with a sexually transmitted infection (STI) in the past 6 months.
- PrEP is also recommended for people who inject drugs and have an injection partner with HIV or share needles, syringes, or other injection equipment. If you have been prescribed PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) and have used multiple prescriptions of PEP, you should consider taking PrEP.

### 3. Medication Instructions

- Truvada and Descovy are the 2 medications approved for use as PrEP.
  - Truvada is for all people at risk for HIV through sex or injection drug use.
  - Descovy is for people at risk for HIV through sex, except for people assigned female at birth who are at risk of getting HIV through vaginal sex.
- There are 30 pills of medication in each bottle (30-days of PrEP).
- Store the bottle at room temperature (not in refrigerator/hot car).
- This medication can be taken with or without food.
- This medication can be taken when drinking alcohol or using drugs.
- Do not share your PrEP medication with others; it may seem like a generous thing to do, but could actually cause harm. PrEP is not safe for everyone.

### 4. One Pill per Day

- Take 1 pill every day.
- Only studies of daily dosing have shown PrEP to be effective. People who use PrEP more consistently have higher levels of protection against HIV.
- The time it takes for PrEP to be effective varies
  - *It takes about 7 days of daily use to reach maximum HIV protection in rectal (anal) tissue.*
  - *It takes about 21 days of daily use to reach maximum HIV protection in vaginal tissue.*
- We have **no** evidence that taking more than one pill a day gives any additional protection. In fact, taking too many can be bad for your health or make you feel sick.
- There are studies currently investigating if taking PrEP less than once a day would still help to protect people from HIV, but there are no results from these studies yet. Based on what we know right now, we recommend taking PrEP as close to daily as possible.

### 5. Getting into a Routine

- Many people find it helpful to take their pills at the same time as something else they regularly do each day (e.g., eating breakfast, brushing teeth).
- Reminders (alarms or seeing the bottle somewhere you look each day) can also help.
- Pill boxes are available if you want to try one.
- When routines are disrupted (e.g., staying out overnight, going on vacation, skipping meals), consider carrying extra pills on you.

### 6. Sometimes Doses are Missed

- People sometimes forget or skip doses. It is not uncommon.
- If you forget 1 dose just take it when you remember. For example:
  - *If you usually take in AM, but realize at 10PM that you forgot, it's ok to take 1 pill then and continue with your usual schedule the next day.*
- If you forget to take more than 1 dose, contact your medical provider

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### 7. Potential Side-Effects

- Some people experience side effects when starting PrEP. This may involve stomach pain, nausea, headaches, and fatigue or tiredness.
- These symptoms are usually mild and go away within the 1st month on PrEP.
- Strategies to deal with stomach related symptoms:
  - take pill with food or a snack
  - take pill at night before bedtime
- Contact the PrEP staff if you have side effects (see phone number at end of handout). We can help.

### 8. How Well Does PrEP Work?

- Studies have shown that PrEP reduces the risk of getting HIV from sex by about 99% when taken consistently.
- For people who inject drugs, PrEP reduces the risk of getting HIV by at least 74% when taken consistently.

### 9. Discussing PrEP with Others

- People sometimes find it helpful to tell friends or family that they are taking PrEP (can help support pill taking).
- Think carefully about whom you might want to tell you're taking PrEP (you want it to be someone who will be supportive).
- It's your personal decision. You should not feel pressured to tell anyone.

### 10. Stopping PrEP

- If you choose to stop PrEP, please call the PrEP staff to let us know.
- Consider taking PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) for 28 days after your last high-risk exposure. The PrEP staff will be happy to talk with you more about this.
- Please come to the clinic for HIV testing 4 weeks after stopping PrEP.

### 11. Restarting PrEP

- If you have stopped PrEP for more than 7 days and would like to restart, please call us and let us know so that we can help you do this safely.
- Getting an HIV test before you restart PrEP is very important. If you are already infected with HIV and take PrEP, the virus could become resistant to this medication which means that the medication will no longer work for HIV treatment.
- Report any flu-like symptoms or rashes to your health care provider or PrEP staff as they could be symptoms of early HIV infection.

### 12. Combining PrEP with Other Prevention Strategies

- PrEP isn't 100% effective and also doesn't protect against other STIs like syphilis, gonorrhea or chlamydia
- PrEP should be combined with other prevention strategies, such as condoms, lube, and regular STI testing.

### 13. Health Monitoring While on PrEP

- Your health should be monitored by a health care provider while taking PrEP
- HIV testing every 3 months and creatinine testing every 3-6 months while on PrEP is recommended.

### Questions/Concerns

- Call 1-844-Yea-PrEP (1-844-932-7737) or (213) 351-7699 if you have any questions or concerns, or if you're going to run out of pills before your next visit. If you have an emergency, call 911 or go to the hospital emergency room.

### Additional Resources

- [publichealth.lacounty.gov/dhsp/PEP-PrEP.htm](http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/dhsp/PEP-PrEP.htm)
- [cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DOA/Pages/OA\\_prev\\_PrEP.aspx](http://cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DOA/Pages/OA_prev_PrEP.aspx)
- [cdc.gov/hiv/basics/pep.html](http://cdc.gov/hiv/basics/pep.html)
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