

FAQs about

HIV PrEP



What is HIV PrEP?

PrEP stands for Pre-exposure Prophylaxis. It is the use of **daily medication (antiretroviral therapy - ART)** by HIV negative individuals to lower their chances of **getting HIV**. It is taken both before and after possible exposure to HIV through sex or sharing drug equipment. You may hear it being called by its brand name *Truvada*™.

Who is HIV PrEP for?

HIV PrEP is **for individuals that have a higher chance of getting HIV**. You must be HIV negative to take HIV PrEP.

Does HIV PrEP protect against any other sexually transmitted or blood borne infections?

HIV PrEP **does not protect against other STIs or blood borne infections** such as hepatitis, syphilis, gonorrhea or chlamydia.

Condoms and clean injection equipment (if you inject drugs) do provide protection against other infections as well as against HIV.



How should I take HIV PrEP?

HIV PrEP is taken as one tablet, once a day. The medication can be taken either with or without food.

How soon does HIV PrEP become effective?

There is some protection after two days of taking HIV PrEP. However, seven days of HIV PrEP are needed for full protection in the lining of the rectum and for full protection of the vagina.

It's a good idea to use condoms or other safer sex practices during this time.

What about on-demand HIV PrEP?

On-demand use of HIV PrEP is when you take the medication only when you are planning to have sex, instead of taking it every day.

In Canada, HIV PrEP is only approved for daily use in combination with other HIV prevention strategies as HIV PrEP works best if it is taken every day.

If you are interested in on-demand HIV PrEP, talk to your health care provider to figure out when and how to take it.

What are the side-effects?

HIV PrEP is very safe.

About 10% of individuals who start HIV PrEP will have short term, mild side-effects that usually go away without having to stop the medication.

Usually these symptoms start in the first few days or weeks of starting HIV PrEP and last anywhere from a few days to a month.

Side-effects may include:

- diarrhea
- nausea
- decreased appetite
- abdominal cramping or flatulence
- dizziness
- headaches

For some, HIV PrEP affects how well their kidneys work. Your blood will be tested to measure kidney function before you start the medication.

HIV PrEP can have a small effect on bone mineral density (how strong bones are). If you stop taking HIV PrEP, bone mineral density usually returns to normal quickly. You can maintain strong bones by regular weight bearing exercise, adequate daily calcium intake, and supplemental vitamin D.

What if I have side-effects?

Strategies that some people find helpful to reduce stomach-related symptoms include taking their medications with food, or at night before bedtime.

If you have side-effects that do not go away over time, are severe and/or affect your daily routine, speak with your HIV PrEP prescriber or pharmacist.

How can I remember to take HIV PrEP?

Try to choose a time that fits your daily routine. For example:

- When you're eating breakfast
- When you're brushing your teeth

Reminders like setting phone or watch alarms, putting the bottle somewhere that you look at each day, or using a 7 day pill box (dosette) can also help.

What if I miss a dose?

If you miss your pill on a given day and realize this on that same day, take your pill as soon as you remember.

If you do not remember until the next day, there is no need to take two pills. Just take one pill as usual.

If you miss more than 3 doses of HIV PrEP in a given week, and have had a high risk exposure, speak with your health care provider. You may need to be started on post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP).



What if I vomit a dose?

If you vomit within an hour of taking your pill, wait for the vomiting to stop and take another pill.

If vomiting occurs an hour or more after taking your pill, or you do not see that the pill has been vomited out, take your next dose the next day as usual.

Do I have to stop drinking alcohol because I am taking HIV PrEP?

No, it is safe to take HIV PrEP if you drink alcohol.

If you are worried that your use of alcohol or other substances makes it hard to take HIV PrEP daily, please talk to a health care provider. They may be able to connect you with local services if needed.

Is HIV PrEP safe in pregnancy and during breast/chest-feeding?

If you want to get pregnant or are already pregnant, taking HIV PrEP is safe. It is a good idea to tell your provider as soon as possible so you can get the best care.

HIV PrEP does not prevent pregnancy.

Talk to your healthcare provider if you are planning to take HIV PrEP while breast/chest-feeding.

How does HIV PrEP impact hormonal contraceptives?

Oral, injectable or implant hormonal contraceptives do not change the effectiveness of HIV PrEP medication.

HIV PrEP does not make hormonal contraceptives less effective.

What if I want to stop taking HIV PrEP?

If you decide to stop HIV PrEP, tell your health care provider. This is especially important if you have chronic hepatitis B infection. If you have chronic hepatitis B and you stop taking PrEP, you may have a flare up of your infection

HIV PrEP should be continued for at least 48 hours after possible exposure to HIV. For the best protection, continue to use for up to 28 days.

You will need an HIV test before starting HIV PrEP again.



Can I share my prescription with friends or partners?

Prescription drugs should not be shared.

Everyone reacts differently to medication. Individuals may have specific allergies, or other drug interactions, or an underlying health condition that does not allow them to take HIV PrEP.

It is really important that individuals are confirmed HIV negative before starting, and while taking, HIV PrEP.



How should I store my HIV PrEP medicine?

Keep the medication in the original container at room temperature, out of direct sunlight and protect it from moisture. Keep it out of the reach of children.



BC Centre for Disease Control
Provincial Health Services Authority