

Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) to Prevent HIV Infection

What is PEP?

PEP stands for post-exposure prophylaxis. The word “prophylaxis” means to prevent or control the spread of an infection or disease. **PEP means taking medicines within 72 hours after a possible exposure to HIV to prevent becoming infected with HIV.**

PEP should be used only in emergency situations. It is not meant for regular use by people who may be exposed to HIV frequently. PEP is not intended to replace regular use of other HIV prevention methods, such as consistent use of condoms during sex or pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). PrEP is when people at high risk for HIV infection take a specific HIV medicine daily to prevent getting HIV.

The decision to start PEP is not an easy one. Tang Center staff is here to support you. Please see the section on Additional Resources for support options.

Who should consider taking PEP?

If you think you were recently exposed to HIV, contact your health care provider immediately or go to an emergency room right away.

You may be prescribed PEP if you are HIV negative or don't know your HIV status, and in the last 72 hours you:

- Think you may have been exposed to HIV during sex
 - Examples of high risk sexual experiences include unprotected anal or vaginal sex or sex where blood exposure may have occurred
- Shared needles or drug preparation equipment (works)
- Were sexually assaulted
- Were under the influence of alcohol or other drugs and are unsure if you were exposed to HIV
- Are a healthcare worker following a possible exposure to HIV at work such as a needlestick injury

Your health care provider will help to decide whether PEP is right for you..

When should PEP be started?

PEP must be started within 72 hours (3 days) after a possible exposure to HIV. The sooner you start PEP after a possible HIV exposure, the better. **According to research, PEP will most likely not prevent HIV infection if it is started more than 72 hours after a person is exposed to HIV.**

How long is PEP taken for?

If you are prescribed PEP, you will need to take the HIV medicines every day for 28 days. You will need to see your healthcare provider during treatment with PEP to check for potential side effects and to arrange for testing for HIV or other STIs after you finish taking PEP. Typically retesting occurs at 4-6 weeks after potential exposure and then again at 3 months after potential exposure. **You and your clinician should discuss if it is appropriate for you to start PrEP (Daily HIV pre exposure prophylaxis) immediately upon completing PEP to prevent future HIV exposures.**

What HIV medicines are used for PEP?

The Tang Center prescribes one of two different regimens. Both are equally effective. Typically we prescribe dolutegravir plus Truvada daily for 28 days. If someone may be pregnant or is pregnant we prescribe raltegravir twice daily with Truvada once daily for 28 days.

How well does PEP work?

PEP is very effective in preventing HIV infection when it's taken correctly, but it's not 100% effective. The sooner you start PEP after a possible HIV exposure, the better. Completing the full course of PEP is important to give you the greatest chance of not acquiring HIV. While taking PEP, it's important to keep using other HIV prevention methods, such as using condoms with sex partners and using only new, sterile needles when injecting drugs.

Does PEP cause side effects?

The HIV medicines used for PEP may cause side effects in some people. The side effects can be treated and aren't life-threatening. If you are taking PEP, talk to your health care

provider if you have any side effect that bothers you or that does not go away. The most common side effects of PEP are upset stomach, bone and joint pain, and headache.

PEP medicines may also interact with other medicines that you may be taking. Because of potential drug interactions, it's important to tell your health care provider about any other medicines that you take.

Thanks for Coming In!

Coming in today was a huge first step. We know that it may be difficult to communicate your desire to engage in safer sexual experiences with partners. If this is a concern for you consider scheduling an appointment with Social Services, or our Healthy Sexuality Coach, to help you explore partner communication skills that feel right, and safe, for you.

Book an Appointment: 510-642-2000 or come to Urgent Care

Additional Resources

This document was based on resources from the CDC

CDC Links: <https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/risk/prep/index.html>

San Francisco Aids Foundation: <https://www.sfaf.org/>

AIDS Healthcare Foundation Oakland: <https://www.aidshealth.org/>

Path To Care: <https://care.berkeley.edu/>

Healthy Sexuality Coaching: <https://uhs.berkeley.edu/healthcoaching>