

# PrEP

## INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

$$\left[ \begin{array}{c} \text{STAY} \\ \text{SAFE} \end{array} \right] + \left[ \begin{array}{c} \text{TEST} \\ \text{OFTEN} \end{array} \right] + \left[ \begin{array}{c} \text{TREAT} \\ \text{EARLY} \end{array} \right] = \left[ \begin{array}{c} \text{END} \\ \text{ING} \\ \text{HIV} \end{array} \right]$$

[ENDINGHIV.ORG.NZ/PREP](https://endinghiv.org.nz/prep)

# CONTENTS

## 4

What is PrEP?

## 6

Who will benefit from PrEP?

Sex between men

## 7

Sex between men and women

## 8

What happens when I start on PrEP?

## 9

What if I want to stop using PrEP?

Where can I get PrEP in New Zealand?

What are the options for  
obtaining PrEP?

## 10

New Zealand's personal importation  
scheme for medicines

## 11

Buying medicines online

How to order generic PrEP online

## 12

The PrEP Programme

## 13

HIV status

Working with a clinician

## 14

Sexual health checks

## 15

How does PrEP work?

How soon does it start working?

## 16

How do I take it?

What if I don't take it every day?

## 17

How effective is it?

Episodic PrEP

## 18

Tips on PrEP use

## 19

Should I keep using condoms?

## 20

Negotiating condoms and disclosure of PrEP use

## 21

PEP or PrEP?

Side effects

## 22

PrEP, pregnancy and breastfeeding

What about PrEP and its interaction with the contraceptive pill?

## 23

Other information and resources

## 24

Ending HIV

# WHAT IS PrEP?

PrEP stands for Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis,  
Prophylaxis meaning — To prevent or control the  
spread of an infection or disease.

## **PrEP is an HIV prevention method in which people who do not have HIV take a pill every day to reduce their risk of becoming infected with HIV.**

PrEP contains two antiretroviral medicines that are also used to treat people who already have HIV infection, tenofovir disoproxil fumarate also known as “TDF” and emtricitabine also known as FTC (in combination known as TDF/FTC). These are among the drugs used to suppress the virus in people living with HIV. You may know this medicine by a brand name Truvada, however there are generic forms of the drug with the same active ingredients.

PrEP must be taken every day in order to be effective. If doses are missed it may reduce the effectiveness of the medication.

In terms of HIV prevention, you can think about PrEP in a similar way to condoms. When condoms are used correctly and consistently they provide a high degree of protection against HIV, but if they are not used consistently your risk of contracting HIV increases dramatically. Condoms — like PrEP — can't protect you if they're not being used! PrEP is not a vaccine and only provides protection from HIV so long as you continue to take it as prescribed. However, unlike condoms, PrEP does not protect you against other sexually transmitted infections like syphilis or gonorrhoea.

# WHO WILL BENEFIT FROM PrEP?

PrEP is an HIV prevention option that may be considered by anyone who is at risk of acquiring HIV.

Some groups of people have been identified as benefiting the most from PrEP due to being at high risk of HIV infection. These groups include men who have sex with men, transgender people and heterosexual people who have a partner who is living with HIV (who does not have an undetectable viral load).

Guidelines for PrEP use have been developed for Australasia and are based on the US Guidelines. The Australasian Guidelines have been endorsed by ASHM, the peak body representing and supporting HIV clinicians in Australia and New Zealand. Your clinician may refer to those guidelines when discussing whether PrEP will be of benefit to you.

When PrEP becomes fully funded in New Zealand it is likely that it will be funded only for those people who fall within the recommended guidelines.

If you do not fall within the recommended guidelines but feel that you would benefit from accessing PrEP, you can discuss this with your clinician and you may be able to self-fund your use of PrEP.

## SEX BETWEEN MEN

The Australasian guidance for clinicians to prescribe daily PrEP is related to being at high risk of acquiring HIV. Therefore PrEP is recommended if the individual acknowledges:

- Being likely to have multiple events of condomless anal intercourse, with or without intravenous drug use (IDU), in the next 3 months (indicating sustained risk);

And having any of the following:

- Being the regular sexual partner of an HIV-infected man with whom condoms were not consistently used in the last 3 months (HIV positive partner is not on treatment and/or has detectable viral load);
- At least one episode of receptive condomless anal intercourse with a male partner who is either living with HIV, or whose HIV status is unknown, in the last 3 months;
- Rectal gonorrhoea, rectal chlamydia or infectious syphilis diagnosis during the last 3 months or at screening;
- Methamphetamine use in the last 3 months.

## SEX BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN

The Australasian guidance for clinicians to prescribe daily PrEP is related to being at high risk of acquiring HIV. Therefore PrEP is recommended if the individual acknowledges:

- Being likely to have multiple events of condomless anal or vaginal intercourse, with or without IDU, in the next 3 months (indicating sustained risk);

And:

- Being a regular sexual partner of a person living with HIV with whom condoms were not consistently used in the last 3 months (HIV positive partner is not on treatment and/or has detectable viral load).

**Transgender people who are at high risk of acquiring HIV are also eligible for PrEP following the same criteria applied to sex between men.**

# WHAT HAPPENS

## WHEN I START ON PrEP?

If you meet the prescribing guidelines for PrEP and choose to use it to reduce your risk of HIV infection, there are a number of steps to get you started. You will continue to have three-monthly appointments for the duration of the time that you are on PrEP.

### INITIAL APPOINTMENT

- Run through participant information and consent forms
- HIV, STI and other health tests
- Receive prescription for three months

### ONE MONTH FOLLOW UP

- HIV, STI and other health monitoring
- Receive prescription for another three months (this will ensure you have enough back-up PrEP to cover any delays in shipping and customs clearance between regular three-monthly prescriptions)

### THREE MONTH FOLLOW UP

*(Regular monitoring appointments are required every three months while on PrEP)*

- HIV, STI and other health monitoring
- Receive prescription for three months



## **WHAT IF I WANT TO STOP USING PrEP?**

If you decide that you do not want to take PrEP any longer please let your clinician know before you stop. PrEP should be continued for 28 days after the last potential HIV exposure in order to have maximum protective effect. Talking to your clinician will allow you to find out about any other possible health risks or special requirements before you stop.

## **WHERE CAN I GET PrEP IN NEW ZEALAND?**

Truvada, the drug used for PrEP, has been approved for use as PrEP in New Zealand by Medsafe, however, it is not yet available at a subsidised price through PHARMAC. Community and medical organisations are urging PHARMAC to subsidise PrEP as soon as possible.

## **WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS FOR OBTAINING PrEP?**

If your doctor agrees that you meet the prescribing guidelines for PrEP, your doctor can prescribe Truvada. The cost of Truvada for PrEP is approximately \$1000 for a 30 day supply, which will be too expensive for many people.

Another option is to purchase a generic version of Truvada from a reliable overseas supplier and import it to New Zealand. Generics are copies of brand name drugs. The cost of generic Truvada is much less than the brand-name and would be approximately \$100 per month, which will still be too expensive for some, but an option for others.

# **NEW ZEALAND'S PERSONAL IMPORTATION SCHEME FOR MEDICINES**

You can legally import most medicines for your personal use under New Zealand's personal importation scheme. This involves arranging from within New Zealand for a medicine to be sent to you from an overseas supplier or family/friend. The medicines are only to be used by you and must not be supplied to any other person. It is important to note that such medicines may not be approved for supply in New Zealand by Medsafe; and there are no guarantees about their safety or quality. Subject to satisfying various conditions you may import a 3 month supply (at the maximum dose recommended by the manufacturer) of an unapproved medicine without any prior approval required by Medsafe.

Medicines ordered over the internet require a New Zealand-issued prescription from your doctor. To purchase or import a generic version of Truvada into New Zealand, you must first get a valid New Zealand issued prescription to accompany the medicine being imported.

The New Zealand-issued prescription must contain the scientific names of PrEP (Tenofovir DF 300mg once daily plus Emtricitabine 200mg once daily as a combination tablet), not the brand name. It must cover a maximum of 90 days, without repeats.

## BUYING MEDICINES ONLINE

The internet can offer consumers a convenient and less expensive way to access medicines. However, online purchases of medicines must be approached with caution. Medicines available on international websites are not regulated by Medsafe. You need to ensure that the website is legitimate, otherwise consumers face risks, including that medicines are fake, past their use-by date or not manufactured to appropriate standards. Medical guidance from the internet should never replace consultation with your doctor and should be interpreted with caution.

## HOW TO ORDER GENERIC PrEP ONLINE

Up-to-date information about how to order PrEP online can be found at [endinghiv.org.nz/prep](http://endinghiv.org.nz/prep)

**Medical guidance from the internet  
should never replace consultation  
with your doctor and should be  
interpreted with caution.**

# THE PrEP PROGRAMME

Going on PrEP isn't just about taking a pill every day. It should be considered a health programme that you are taking on in partnership with a clinician.

## **HIV STATUS**

**Firstly and most importantly, it is essential that you are tested for HIV prior to commencing PrEP.**

Starting PrEP when you have already been diagnosed with HIV could lead to the virus becoming resistant to antiretroviral treatments, which may reduce your treatment options in the future.

When you have your HIV test, discuss with your clinician when your last potential exposure was so that you can both be confident that you are not in the window period (the time between when an infection occurs and it is detectable by an HIV test). Before commencing PrEP and during PrEP it is important to inform your team looking after you, if you have any symptoms which are consistent with HIV seroconversion such as sweats, fevers or other flu-like symptoms.

## **WORKING WITH A CLINICIAN**

Forming a good relationship with your clinician is one of the most important things that you can do for your health. When it comes to PrEP, you are potentially going to be having some detailed discussions about your sexual practices and other relevant issues such as alcohol and other drug use.

## SEXUAL HEALTH CHECKS

As part of the PrEP programme, regular check-ups for HIV and sexually transmissible infections (STIs) should be part of your routine.

You will need to see your clinician every three months for comprehensive sexual health testing and new scripts for PrEP.

It is important to know if you have an STI and testing is the only way to be sure, as many STIs can have no symptoms. When left untreated, STIs can cause health complications and you may be passing them on to your sexual partners.

A sexual health check is easy. You should have STI tests of your urine, vagina, throat, anorectum, and blood (according to your sex, gender, and sexual practices), including a test for HIV. Your clinician will advise you as to what specific testing regime is right for you. If you do get an STI, a clinician can assist you with contacting your previous sexual partners so that they can get tested as well.

Both the active drugs in PrEP (TDF/ FTC) work to treat hepatitis B, so you will be tested to know if you have active hepatitis B. This will allow a clinician to recommend you an appropriate treatment. Additionally, if you have not yet been vaccinated for hepatitis A and B, this is something to discuss with your clinician.

## OTHER MONITORING

In addition to regular sexual health checks, there are other aspects of your health that your clinician will be monitoring. PrEP has been associated with some side effects in a small proportion of people receiving it. Your clinician will monitor you for these side effects with blood tests of kidney function (among others). For more information on the potential side effects of taking PrEP see page 21.

## HOW DOES PREP WORK?

When taking PrEP, the medication will build up in your system to the point where it is effective in preventing the replication cycle of the virus, which will reduce the chance that it will take hold in your body. For more information on how PrEP works and to watch a 5 minute video that explains it all, visit: [whatisprep.org](https://whatisprep.org)

## HOW SOON DOES IT START WORKING?

It takes time for PrEP to build up to levels in your body that are considered protective. The exact length of time is still not clear and is being investigated.

Studies have shown that protection is achieved after 7 days for rectal tissue, however for full protection to be achieved in blood and vaginal tissue it will take 20 days.

To be on the safe side you should assume that you aren't getting maximum protection until at least 20 days after you begin taking PrEP, if you take it consistently without missing any pills. This is recommended for all people taking PrEP.

## HOW DO I TAKE IT?

PrEP is a pill that has been shown to be most effective when taken once daily. You should try to take it at the same time each day – whenever is convenient for you.

This might be during a regular activity, such as taking it with breakfast each morning or when brushing your teeth before bed at night. You might like to set reminders on your phone to ensure you remember to take it each day. If you have a busy or unpredictable schedule, you may want to plan other ways to make sure you take PrEP consistently. It is important to remember to take your PrEP with you when you travel or plan to be away from home for a few days. Your clinician might be able to help you to come up with strategies that are right for you.

## WHAT IF I DON'T TAKE IT EVERY DAY?

If you miss a dose of PrEP, don't panic. Resume taking your pills as soon as you remember. It is not recommended to double dose PrEP. If you consistently miss doses, you may lose some of the protective benefit of taking PrEP. If remembering to take your pills is a problem, you should speak with your clinician and friends who regularly take medications to discuss strategies to ensure you can take PrEP consistently.

The results of the effectiveness of PrEP have come from clinical trials based on daily dosing. People who took the pills daily (or almost every day) were much less likely to get HIV than those who took their pills less often.



## HOW EFFECTIVE IS IT?

Studies have shown that if PrEP is taken every day as prescribed it reduces the risk of getting HIV by at least 92%, and up to 99%.

It is important to note that, like other HIV prevention methods it is not 100% protective. As of February 2017, there have been three cases reported globally of gay men becoming infected with HIV despite taking their PrEP pills daily. In two of these cases the men were infected with a strain of HIV that had developed resistance to the medicines in PrEP and in the other case the reason for infection is unknown.

## EPISODIC PrEP

Another way to take PrEP for people who are at highest risk of contracting HIV only during a specific time or life event (for example, going on a gay cruise) is episodic PrEP. To ensure maximum protection, you should start PrEP at least 7 days before the exposure to risk, continue it daily during the episode of exposure, and then for another 28 days after the last possible exposure (staying with our example, from 7 days before boarding the ship, through to the whole duration of the cruise, and for 28 days after the last time you had anal sex without condoms).

**If PrEP is taken every day as prescribed it reduces the risk of getting HIV by at least 92%, and up to 99%.**

# TIPS

## ON PrEP USE

Here are some quick and helpful hints on how to give yourself the best chance to take your pills daily as prescribed so you get the maximum benefit from the treatment you take, whatever your circumstance.

- Reminders, either in your phone or a beeper which you can get from a pharmacy, can be your little nudge to remember. These are easy to set and a great way to help you remember to take your pills.
- Pill boxes can also help you keep track of when you have taken your meds. A seven day a week pill box can easily help you track if and when you have taken your pills and can also be purchased in most pharmacies.
- Keep pills in a convenient place. Having your pills close by and convenient will make taking them easy. They should be stored at room temperature, avoiding direct sunlight.
- Plan ahead. If you are having a night out or travelling take 5 minutes to plan what that might mean to you taking your pills. It is usually easy to find a discrete place to take them with a drink. If travelling overseas, work out the best time to take them and be sure to pack some in your carry-on luggage. Take the original prescription with you in case you are asked for it by immigration officials.

- If you drink or use drugs, remembering to take your pill might be a little tricky. Carry your next dose with you and do your best to take it close enough to the time you normally would.
- Practice with things like vitamins, supplements or even with something as simple as a tic tac to get you in the habit of taking a pill regularly.
- Most importantly, get into a routine. The easiest way to remember to take your medications is by doing it regularly at the same time each day or as near to as possible.

## SHOULD I KEEP USING CONDOMS?

When PrEP is taken daily it is highly effective in preventing HIV transmission and gives protection against HIV transmission that is comparable to condoms, although it is not a guarantee against infection. Using condoms will be a choice for you and your sexual partners. It is important to remember that PrEP does not prevent the transmission of other STIs. If you do not use condoms, it is important to test regularly and treat STIs if you acquire them.

**The easiest way to remember to take your medications is by doing it regularly at the same time each day or as near to as possible.**

## NEGOTIATING CONDOMS AND DISCLOSURE OF PrEP USE

If you talk about PrEP with your sexual partners, you may find yourself becoming an educator in certain situations. Sometimes this may be a welcome opportunity, while at other times it may be more challenging. If you want to refer people to more information, there is information about PrEP at [endinghiv.org.nz/prep](http://endinghiv.org.nz/prep)

It is important for everyone, including those who use condoms, to understand how PrEP works so that they can effectively negotiate how to protect themselves from HIV during sex.

If you tell your sexual partners you are taking PrEP there is no way (unlike when condoms are used) for them to verify its use, or to know if you have been taking it correctly. So it's important to respect other people's decisions; if your sexual partners prefer to use a condom then that's their right.

Nobody should have to take someone else's word for it that they are safe. To end HIV in New Zealand it's important that all HIV-negative people are taking action to protect themselves during sex through the use of condoms or PrEP.

For HIV positive partners of people on PrEP, the legal requirement for disclosure of being HIV positive has not changed. There has not been a test case to determine whether the partner being on PrEP would constitute taking 'reasonable precautions' as a legal defense.

For more information on the legal requirements about disclosure of HIV status you can go to:

<http://www.nzaf.org.nz/resources-research/resources/>

## PEP OR PrEP?

Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) has been in use in New Zealand for some time and consists of a 28-day course of two or three antiretroviral drugs like TDF/FTC that must be started within the first 72 hours after exposure to HIV. PEP is intended to prevent HIV if exposure events are not-frequent or just happened one time. If you have taken multiple courses of PEP in a short time, you should think about PrEP, as it works better for people who are potentially exposed to HIV on a regular basis. PrEP, if taken daily and consistently alongside other prevention measures such as condoms, is a more suitable option.

## SIDE EFFECTS

PrEP is generally very well tolerated and most of the potential side effects are quite mild. A minority (up to 20%) of people may experience mild symptoms such as nausea, headaches and diarrhoea. If this occurs, symptoms mostly disappear after the first few weeks or month. In a minority of cases, some have experienced more severe side effects. If at any stage you are concerned that you may be experiencing side effects from taking PrEP, you should contact your clinician to discuss your options.

If you have existing kidney, liver or bone problems such as osteoporosis, or are taking any other medications, speak to your clinician about whether PrEP is the right choice for you.

If you are undertaking hormone treatments, discuss this with your clinician prior to starting taking PrEP, however there do not appear to be any interactions.

# **PrEP, PREGNANCY AND BREASTFEEDING**

For women trying to become pregnant while using PrEP it is recommended that you start taking daily doses of PrEP one month before a conception attempt and continue until one month after the last attempt to conceive. It is strongly recommended that you speak with your clinician if you are trying to conceive while taking PrEP. As the effects of taking PrEP are unknown on new born babies, if you are considering PrEP and you are breastfeeding or planning to breastfeed, raise this with your clinician as soon as possible.

## **WHAT ABOUT PrEP AND ITS INTERACTION WITH THE CONTRACEPTIVE PILL?**

If you are on the oral contraceptive pill and considering using PrEP, speak with your clinician before commencing PrEP. Your clinician will check for any interactions between PrEP and the oral contraceptive pill.

# OTHER INFORMATION AND RESOURCES

PrEP has been available for use in the United States since 2012 and a number of organisations and individuals have been providing information about PrEP and the experience taking it.

Please note that some of the information contained in these websites is specific to the US.

These are intended to supplement your knowledge about PrEP but the best way to find out more about using PrEP in New Zealand is to talk to your clinician.

[endinghiv.org.nz/prep](http://endinghiv.org.nz/prep)

[ashm.org.au/hiv/hivpre](http://ashm.org.au/hiv/hivpre)

[whatisprep.org](http://whatisprep.org)

[truvada.com](http://truvada.com)

[men.prepfacts.org](http://men.prepfacts.org)

The information in this booklet is for general health care information purposes only, and anyone considering PrEP should talk to a doctor with HIV or sexual health experience about whether PrEP is right for them.

## ENDING HIV

We are passionately committed to working hand in hand with partners and the community to end HIV in New Zealand. Our mission is to prevent the spread of HIV and support people living with HIV, their friends and whanau. By staying safe, testing often and treating early we can stop HIV in its tracks.

The Ending HIV programme has an ambitious goal of no new transmissions of HIV in New Zealand by 2025. We know this is a bold ambition, but we believe it is achievable if everyone comes on board. We invite community, government, doctors, educators, family, friends and whanau to commit to the vision of a world without HIV.

For more information, contact us at 09 303 3124 or [hello@endinghiv.org.nz](mailto:hello@endinghiv.org.nz)



New Zealand AIDS Foundation  
Te Tuāpapa Mate Āraikore o Aotearoa