

PrEP: Frequently Asked Questions for Veterans

Is PrEP covered by my VA benefits?

Yes, both medications used for PrEP (Truvada® and Descovy®), are available at VA. Talk to your provider to learn more. Copays may be charged for the medication and provider visits but not for lab work. For Veterans who are not eligible for VA care or have a partner who is not a Veteran and needs PrEP, there is a national PrEP donation program. Learn more: www.getyourprep.com/

Do I have to take it every day?

Yes, PrEP only works if you take it regularly, ideally every day, 7 days per week. Some studies are evaluating other dosing schedules, but until we know more from these studies, we recommend you take it every day.

Do I still need to use condoms?

PrEP is highly effective if it is used correctly and consistently, every day. But, it is not 100% effective. So it is recommended that you use condoms or other methods of reducing HIV risk at the same time you use PrEP. If you are someone who does not use condoms regularly, PrEP may not be as effective as it is for regular condom users but it will still lower your chances of getting HIV (if you take it every day). Another reason to use condoms is that PrEP does not protect you against pregnancy or sexually transmitted infections like syphilis or gonorrhea.

What should I do if I miss a dose?

It is very important to take PrEP every day—it is most effective if the drug levels in your body are consistently high. If you do miss a dose, don't panic. Take the pill as soon as you remember, unless it is already almost time to take the next dose (in that case, do not take a double dose). Contact your provider if you notice that you are missing doses on a regular basis (and especially if you miss more than 1 or 2 doses a week).

What might happen if I miss doses?

If you miss doses of PrEP, your chances of becoming infected with HIV may rise significantly. In addition, if you become infected while you are on PrEP, your HIV virus may become resistant to the medications used to treat HIV.

What medication is used for PrEP?

There are two options for PrEP. One called "Truvada®" contains two medications (tenofovir and emtricitabine) that act against the HIV virus. The other is "Descovy®" and it contains emtricitabine and tenofovir alafenamide. Talk to your provider about which medication would be best for you.

What are the side effects of PrEP?

Most people who take PrEP have no side effects. Some experience nausea, diarrhea, or headache when they first start it; these symptoms usually get better within a couple of weeks. PrEP can cause problems with kidney function—this is uncommon, and your provider will monitor your kidneys. It may slightly decrease the strength of your bones; the significance of this is not clear.

Discuss all potential side effects with your provider.

Can I take PrEP with my other medicines?

Truvada® and Descovy® do not affect most other medications. For example, they can be taken with blood pressure and diabetes medications, methadone, and hormones (including birth control pills).

How can I get started on PrEP?

Discuss your interest in PrEP with your VA provider. Your provider can let you know what lab tests might be needed prior to starting PrEP.



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Will I have to take PrEP for the rest of my life?

No, unlike HIV medications for people who are infected with HIV, PrEP is not lifelong therapy. It is intended to help during periods when you may be at risk of getting HIV infection. If your risk for HIV decreases, talk to your provider about stopping PrEP.

My partner is HIV positive and we would like to become pregnant. Can PrEP help us conceive safely?

Yes, PrEP can be used around the time of conception to reduce the risk of infecting the HIV-negative partner. Discuss this with your provider.

What if I want to stop PrEP?

Discuss this with your provider. In general, we recommend continuing PrEP for 28 days after your last high-risk exposure.

What if I become infected with HIV?

If you develop HIV, your provider will have you stop taking PrEP and will refer you for treatment for HIV. Truvada® or Descovy® alone is not strong enough to control HIV infection, and if you continue taking it, the HIV virus may become resistant to the medications.

Resources

- ▶ VA National HIV website (www.hiv.va.gov)
- ▶ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (www.cdc.gov/hiv/risk/prep/index.html)
- ▶ HIV.gov (www.hiv.gov)
- ▶ Ready, Set, PrEP donation program (www.getyourprep.com)