

PrEP

INFORMATION FOR PATIENTS

[STAY SAFE] + [TEST OFTEN] + [TREAT EARLY] = ENDING HIV

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

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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 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 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 sexual health doctors in Australia and New Zealand. Your doctor may refer to those guidelines when discussing whether PrEP will be of benefit to you.

PrEP is a funded medicine in New Zealand. That means it can be accessed on prescription by anyone who meets criteria developed by PHARMAC.

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

MEN (CIS OR TRANS) AND TRANS WOMEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN

The PHARMAC criteria for doctors to prescribe funded 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 in the next 3 months;

And having any of the following:

- At least one episode of receptive condomless anal intercourse with one or more casual male partners in the last 3 months;
- Rectal gonorrhoea, rectal chlamydia or infectious syphilis diagnosis during the last 3 months;
- Methamphetamine use in the last 3 months.

Cis/cisgender: a person who identifies with the gender and legal sex classification assigned to them at birth.

Trans/transgender: a person who identifies as a gender and legal sex classification different to what was assigned to them at birth.

PARTNERS OF PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV

The PHARMAC criteria for doctors to prescribe funded daily PrEP is related to being at high risk of acquiring HIV. Therefore, PrEP is recommended if the individual acknowledges:

- 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).

TAKE THE QUIZ: IS PrEP RIGHT FOR ME?

Take the quiz at endinghiv.org.nz/prep. This simple online quiz follows guidelines for doctors prescribing PrEP. Designed to let you know if PrEP is a good idea for you, this quiz offers a recommendation to access PrEP for those that fit within the criteria. Please note that PrEP may still be prescribed to individuals who don't meet the PHARMAC guidelines, but those individuals would need to self-fund their PrEP by, for example, importing from overseas.

WHAT ARE THE OPTIONS FOR OBTAINING PrEP?

If your doctor agrees that PrEP is right for you, they can prescribe Truvada. If you are eligible for publicly funded healthcare in New Zealand, and you meet the PHARMAC criteria, then your PrEP pills will be funded. You'll only need to pay a \$5 co-payment at your local pharmacy per three-month supply.

If you aren't eligible for publicly funded healthcare (for example, if you're an international student), or you don't meet the PHARMAC criteria, then you will need to self-fund your PrEP pills. This involves purchasing a generic version of Truvada from a reliable overseas supplier and importing it to New Zealand. Generics are copies of brand name drugs. The cost of generic Truvada ranges from \$50 to \$100 per month, which will still be too expensive for some, but an option for others.

IMPORTING PrEP FROM OVERSEAS

You can legally import generic PrEP from overseas for your personal use. This involves arranging from within New Zealand for a medicine to be sent to you from an overseas supplier.

To 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.

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 you 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.

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HOW TO ORDER GENERIC PrEP ONLINE

Up-to-date information about how to order PrEP online can be found at endinghiv.org.nz/prep

FIND A DOCTOR WHO PRESCRIBES PrEP

The online map at endinghiv.org.nz/prepmap shows doctors in New Zealand with experience prescribing PrEP.

INFORMATION FOR DOCTORS

The PHARMAC funding criteria require that your GP or family doctor consult with a sexual health or HIV specialist before prescribing PrEP to you for the first time. This consultation can be a simple email or phone call.

LEARN HOW TO PRESCRIBE PrEP

If you want your regular GP or family doctor to learn more about prescribing PrEP, they can complete the ASHM online training module to learn how to prescribe PrEP in New Zealand.

The New Zealand AIDS Foundation website has all the information they'll need: nzaf.org.nz/prepclinicians

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 information about PrEP
- HIV, STI and other health tests
- Receive prescription for three months

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

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 doctor.

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 doctor 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 DOCTOR

Forming a good relationship with your doctor 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 doctor 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 doctor will advise you as to what specific testing regime is right for you.

If you do get an STI, a doctor 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 doctor 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 doctor.

OTHER MONITORING

In addition to regular sexual health checks, there are other aspects of your health that your doctor will be monitoring. PrEP has been associated with some side effects in a small proportion of people receiving it. Your doctor 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://www.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 being investigated, but guidelines have been developed on the basis that it takes longer for it to build up in vaginal than rectal tissue.

Studies have shown that protection is achieved after 7 days for rectal tissue. However, for full protection to be achieved in penile and vaginal tissue, or for injecting drug use, it will take 20 days.

While on PrEP you need to take the medication every day. If you don't take it daily, your level of protection against HIV will be lessened.

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 doctor 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 doctor 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 2018, 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

FOR TAKING YOUR PILL EVERY DAY

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.
- 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 like syphilis or gonorrhoea. 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

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: 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 doctor 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 doctor about whether PrEP is the right choice for you.

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

WHAT IF I WANT TO STOP USING PrEP?

If you decide that you do not want to take PrEP any longer please let your doctor 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 doctor will allow you to find out about any other possible health risks or special requirements before you stop.

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 doctor 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 doctor 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 doctor before commencing PrEP. Your doctor 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 doctor.

endinghiv.org.nz/prep

nzaf.org.nz/prepclinicians/

whatisprep.org

truvada.com

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



New Zealand AIDS Foundation
Te Tuāpapa Mate Āraikore o Aotearoa