

## HIV in Primary Care: An introduction to PrEP

### What is PrEP?

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is a preventative intervention using HIV treatment to stop people from becoming infected by the virus.

### Is there evidence PrEP works?

There have been numerous studies of PrEP, which demonstrate that it is highly effective at reducing HIV acquisition in people at risk. The UK PROUD study looked at the effectiveness of daily PrEP in gay and bisexual men and recorded an effectiveness of 86% (McCormack et al, 2016, Lancet). The IPERGAY study looked at 'on-demand' dosing in France and Canada. It also reported an 86% reduction in HIV transmissions (Molina et al, 2015, NEJM).

The overall benefit of taking PrEP and preventing HIV far outweighs the potential risk of acquiring other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) through sex without condoms.

### The four ways to take PrEP

1. Daily dosing: The most common way PrEP is administered where a pill is taken daily every 24 hours.
2. Holiday PrEP: Taking PrEP during a specific time period where risk of HIV acquisition is increased. Start taking daily 7 days before the period, take daily during the specific period and stop 7 days after the exposure period.
3. On-demand or Event Based Dosing: Taking PrEP if the individual knows they might have condomless sex 24 hours in advance. The regimen is 2 pills 2 – 24 hours before sex, 1 pill 24 hours later and 1 more pill 24 hours after that.
4. 'Ts and Ss' – 4 pills a week: PrEP is taken 4 times per week usually on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday & Sunday – that's why it's called 'the Ts and Ss'.

} These methods are only suitable for anal sex

### Possible side effects and interactions

Side effects are most likely seen during the first month of taking PrEP and can include nausea, flatulence, abdominal pain, dizziness and headache. These are rarely so troublesome that people stop taking PrEP as a result.

The University of Liverpool HIV Drug Interactions tool provides a resource detailing which medications should be avoided or used with caution:

[www.hiv-druginteractions.org](http://www.hiv-druginteractions.org)

### Who is eligible for PrEP?

The groups most at risk of HIV in the UK include:

- gay and bisexual men (including trans men)
- black African men and women
- trans women
- partners of people with HIV who are not on effective treatment
- people who inject drugs with no access to needle exchange programmes.



## How can patients obtain PrEP?

PrEP is only available for free from some sexual health clinics as part of the IMPACT trial in England: [www.prepimpacttrial.org.uk](http://www.prepimpacttrial.org.uk)

Some people are also ordering generic versions of PrEP online. You can find more information from I Want PrEP Now: [www.iwantprepnow.co.uk](http://www.iwantprepnow.co.uk)

## What is my role as a GP regarding PrEP?

- Identify those at risk of acquiring HIV by talking to your patients about their individual sexual health risk. Bring up the topic and do a rapid sexual health risk assessment.
- Tell your patients about PrEP – 'a pill to prevent HIV' and signpost them to more information at [www.iwantprepnow.co.uk](http://www.iwantprepnow.co.uk)
- Refer your patients to relevant specialist clinics (remember referral letter!).

## What monitoring tests are recommended?

It is imperative people considering PrEP **test for HIV** before they begin any course of treatment and 4 weeks after starting. Monitoring is likely to occur in sexual health services. This includes the following tests:

### Before starting and 3 monthly:

- HIV testing (combined antigen/antibody test)
- STI screen: chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis
- Hepatitis B and hepatitis C for those at ongoing risk.

### Annually:

- U&Es including eGFR (more frequently if eGFR <90, over 40 years old or risk factors for renal disease).

## Resources

- Public Health England (PHE) 'Fingertips' tool: Find out the HIV and sexual health needs of your area:  
<https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile/sexualhealth>
- PHE surveillance data:  
[www.gov.uk/government/collections/hiv-surveillance-data-and-management](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/hiv-surveillance-data-and-management)
- NICE guidance:  
[www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng60](http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng60)
- Joint British HIV Association (BHIVA) and British Association for Sexual Health and HIV (BASHH) guidelines on the use of HIV PrEP 2018:  
[www.bhiva.org/PrEP-guidelines](http://www.bhiva.org/PrEP-guidelines)
- Sexual Health in Practice (SHIP CIC) peer led training for primary care:  
[www.shiptraining.org.uk](http://www.shiptraining.org.uk)