

POST EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS (PEP) FACT SHEET

What is Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP)?

Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) is a combination of two or three anti-HIV medications that **MAY** prevent HIV infection if taken correctly and within a certain period of time after possible HIV exposure. Research suggests that PEP can reduce your risk of becoming HIV+ by approximately 80%. However, **PEP is NOT a “morning-after pill” to prevent HIV and there is still not a cure for HIV or AIDS.** . It is always best to prevent exposure to HIV by using condoms, not sharing needles, using clean needles, reducing the number of sex partners and asking your partner’s HIV status before sex.

How does PEP work?

PEP drugs stop HIV from multiplying in the body’s cells. The cells that are already HIV-infected would then die naturally without making more copies of HIV. If a person who has been exposed to HIV begins PEP treatment quickly (within 72 hours after the exposure), this reduces the chance that HIV will remain in the body.

When do I take PEP?

We think PEP only works if taken within 72 hours after possible exposure to HIV. The sooner you take PEP, the more likely it is that it will prevent you from becoming infected with HIV. If you wait more than 72 hours, you are not eligible for PEP. Research has shown that PEP does not work after 72 hours because HIV infection could already occur. However, you still should get tested for HIV.

How do I get on a PEP program?

If you have had unprotected sex or shared needles with someone whose HIV status is unknown (but that person is at risk for being HIV infected) **OR** if you have had unprotected sex or shared needles with someone who is HIV+, you probably are eligible for PEP. Your health care provider will ask you questions about your recent sexual activity and/or needle use. Also, you will need to take an HIV test to make sure that you are not already infected with HIV. If you qualify, you will be prescribed 28 days of anti-HIV medications.

How do I take PEP?

You must take your PEP medication for 28 days and not miss any doses. If you miss a dose, it increases the risk that the PEP treatment may not work. Remember: even PEP is not 100% effective for preventing HIV infection.

Are there side effects to PEP?

Common side effects may include nausea, fatigue, vomiting, headaches and diarrhea. Approximately 40% of people who take PEP experience side effects. However, most side effects are mild. Most people don’t have to change or stop taking their medicines because of side effects.

What happens once I finish the 28-day dose?

Once you have completed PEP treatment, you should test for HIV again at 3 months and 6 months to make sure you are not infected with HIV. **Take care of yourself and try not to expose yourself to HIV infection again. Ways to protect yourself include:**

- Using condoms;
- Not sharing needles;
- Being the first person to use the needle if forced to share;

- Cleaning your needles;
- Reducing the number of sex partners; and
- Finding out your partner's HIV status before sex or sharing needles.