

PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis)

What is PrEP

Pre-exposure prophylaxis, or PrEP, is an effective HIV prevention medication. It is an antiretroviral (anti-HIV) drug that helps prevent HIV when taken by HIV-negative people. It works by interfering with the pathways that HIV uses to cause a permanent infection. PrEP is currently only available in pill form (also known as oral PrEP), but other types of PrEP are in development.

PrEP is available as a prescription from your doctor or local community clinics. It is only for HIV prevention. It does not prevent or reduce the transmission of other STIs. Condoms, sex dams, and regular testing continue to be the most effective way for preventing other STIs.

How do I get PrEP?

Talk with your family health care provider or visit a community health centre. Generally, as part of the prescription process, you will take an HIV test to confirm your current status. You will take a second HIV test a month into your prescription and then every 3 months moving forward. When taken consistently, PrEP prevents nearly 100% of sexual HIV transmission¹.

Do I have to pay for PrEP?

- PrEP may have a cost, but support may be available.
- PrEP is covered through Manitoba Pharmacare and Employment and Income Assistance for those who meet the eligibility criteria.
- PrEP is covered for people who have or qualify for First Nations and Inuit Non-Insured Health Benefits.
- Many private third-party health insurance plans cover some or all of the cost of PrEP.
- The cost of PrEP without any coverage is roughly \$250 a month.

Are there any side effects?

PrEP is generally well tolerated, but like any medication, can cause side effects. Most side effects are mild and temporary and only affect between 1%-10% of people.

Possible side effects include:

- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Headaches
- Dizziness

In rare cases, some people experience small decreases in kidney, bone and, rarely, liver health. These changes are reversible after stopping PrEP.

How often do I take PrEP?

An HIV-negative person can lower their chance of getting HIV by taking PrEP regularly, as prescribed. It is recommended that people take PrEP every day. When taken daily, PrEP appears to prevent nearly 100% of sexual HIV transmission¹. Some people choose to use an on-demand (also known as intermittent) routine of taking PrEP instead.

On-demand means taking pills only on days before and after having sex. Someone would take 2 pills between 2-24 hours before. A second pill is taken 24 hours after the first dose followed by a third pill 24 hours later. This is known as a 2-1-1 on-demand dose. If a person continues to have sex, they should continue to take a pill every 24 hours until two days after the last time they have sex. The 2-1-1 method of taking PrEP reduces the risk of HIV infection by 86%¹.

Does PrEP prevent other STIs?

No, PrEP is only for HIV prevention. Condoms, sex dams, and regular testing continue to be the most effective way for preventing other STIs.

How do I know if I have an STI?

- Often STIs have no signs or symptoms. The only way to know is to get tested.

How can I be tested for an STI?

STI tests are available from your health care provider, community health centres, Teen Clinics (if you are 21 or under) and many walk-in clinics. STIs are free and confidential. Testing may include:

- Peeing in a cup. Avoid peeing for 1-2 hours before the test.
- A blood sample.
- A swab of the mouth, anus, or any sores around the genitals.
- A visual exam of the genital area.

Where can I get more information?

- From your health care provider, community health clinic, or public health nurse. If you need a regular healthcare provider, call the Family Doctor Finder at 204-786-7111.
- From the Facts of Life (SERC): E-mail your questions to thefactsoflife@serc.mb.ca.
- From a Teen Clinic if you are 21 or younger
- Online at www.serc.mb.ca or our youth website, www.teentalk.ca

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¹ Arkell, C. (2021, November 3). *Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP)*. CATIE. <https://www.catie.ca/pre-exposure-prophylaxis-prep-0>