PEP 101

PEP stands for Post-Exposure Prophylaxis.

PEP means taking medication after you may have been exposed to HIV to prevent transmission.

The word “prophylaxis” means to control or prevent the spread of an infection or disease.

How Do I Know If I Need PEP?

PEP is for emergency use.

If you may have been exposed to HIV in the last 72 hours, talk to your healthcare provider, an emergency room doctor, or your local health department about PEP right away.

What Should I Expect While I’m Taking PEP?

If your healthcare provider prescribes PEP, you’ll need to take it daily for 28 days.

Tell your healthcare provider if you have trouble remembering to take your pills or want to stop PEP treatment.

It’s important you follow your healthcare provider’s advice about how to take your pills. This will give you the best chance to prevent HIV.

SIDE EFFECTS

PEP is safe, but it may cause side effects like upset stomach and fatigue in some people. These side effects can be treated and are not life-threatening.

You should immediately tell your healthcare provider if these or other symptoms become severe or do not go away.

Can I take PEP every time I have sex without a condom?

No, PEP should be used only in emergency situations.

For more information about PEP, visit cdc.gov/HIV/Basics/Pep.html.

LEARN MORE

Getting and staying on treatment will help you manage your HIV better and can keep you healthy for many years.

For more information about HIV treatment, visit cdc.gov/StopHIVTogether/Treatment.

What Happens if PEP Doesn’t Work and I Contract HIV?

PEP is highly effective in preventing HIV, but if it doesn’t work and you get HIV, the most important step is to get into care and start HIV treatment.

LEARN MORE

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How Do I Get PEP?

You can talk to your healthcare provider (in person or through telehealth), or visit an emergency room, urgent care, or health department to be prescribed PEP. Act right away if you think you’ve recently been exposed to HIV.

How Do I Pay for PEP?

If you are prescribed PEP after a sexual assault, you may qualify for partial or total reimbursement for medicines and clinical care costs through the Office for Victims of Crime, funded by the U.S. Department of Justice. More information is available at ovc.ojp.gov.

If you are prescribed PEP and you cannot get insurance coverage (Medicaid, Medicare, private, or employer-based), your healthcare provider can apply for free PEP medicine through the medication assistance programs run by the manufacturers.