PrEP for Women

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Together, we can change the course of the HIV epidemic...one woman at a time.

#onewomanatatime

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**PrEP** stands for **Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis:**

*Prophylaxis*: Taking medicine *before* being exposed to something, to prevent yourself from getting a disease or condition.
What Is PrEP?

We use *several kinds of medicine* this way:

- **Taking anti-malaria medication** when we travel to areas where we might be bitten by mosquitoes that carry malaria
  - When medicine is in a person's body before getting a mosquito bite, (s)he is much less likely to get sick from malaria when bitten

- For women, **taking contraceptives (birth control pills)**
  - Chances of pregnancy greatly reduced when contraceptives are already in a woman's body when exposed to semen during sex

- **PrEP here:** People who are not living with HIV **take an HIV drug to reduce their risk of acquiring HIV** if they are exposed to the virus

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How Does PrEP Prevent the Spread of HIV?

• CD4 cells infected with HIV become little factories that make thousands of new viruses each day
  – HIV drugs work by blocking HIV from making copies of itself

• If an HIV-negative woman already has HIV drugs in her bloodstream when she is exposed to HIV, e.g., during sex without condoms:
  – Medicine might be able to keep the HIV from making enough copies of itself to "take hold"
  – May prevent her from getting HIV
Approval for Daily Oral PrEP

July 2012: U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved daily Truvada (tenofovir disoproxil fumarate + emtricitabine, or TDF/FTC) as PrEP for sexually active adults at risk of getting HIV
   • Truvada often used as part of combination HIV drug treatment
   • FDA has since approved Descovy (tenofovir alafenamide plus emtricitabine or TAF/FTC) for PrEP; only studied in people assigned male at birth (cisgender men; transgender women)

June 2016: World Health Organization (WHO) updated guidelines recommending PrEP be offered to all people at substantial HIV risk
   • WHO approves Truvada for daily oral PrEP
   • Each country must approve PrEP separately
**December 2021:** FDA approved long-acting injectable form of the integrase inhibitor cabotegravir for PrEP

- Some people are not able to take a daily pill
- First 2 injections of Apretude (US brand name) 1 month apart; 1x every 2 months after that
- Cabotegravir can also be taken as oral medication for 4 weeks before starting injections – ensure no bad reactions to the drug
- Drug hopefully made available worldwide, especially in countries with high HIV rates; concerns about extreme high cost
- Drug stays in people’s bodies long after stopping; especially true for women in studies – could have a higher chance of developing drug resistance if she acquires HIV after stopping

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Has PrEP Been Shown to Be Effective?

- **Efficacy shown**
  - Daily PrEP more than 90% effective for sexual prevention *when taken daily as prescribed*
  - Highly effective as “bridge” for serodifferent couples until partner living with HIV has undetectable viral load
- Current trials among women focus on topical PrEP as well as oral and injectable PrEP

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Why Are Some Research Findings Unclear?

For HIV prevention tools (condoms, PrEP, etc.) to work, they *have to be used – correctly and consistently*

- Studies that showed benefit had **much higher rates of adherence**
- Reasons for non-adherence, especially among women, not fully understood
- *Need for women to participate in studies* to understand adherence issues
Why Are the Research Findings Unclear?

- Reasons why people – especially women – had low levels of adherence to oral PrEP is not yet fully understood.
- Very important to do more research looking at what issues might affect women's interest in or ability to take a drug for HIV prevention.
- Also important for women to know about and take part in future research that will look at unanswered questions about PrEP.

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May 2014: CDC released updated US PrEP use guidelines

- Recommend PrEP with daily, oral Truvada be considered for HIV-negative people who are at substantial risk for HIV, including people who:
  - Are in a sexual relationship with a partner living with HIV
  - Don’t regularly use condoms/don’t know HIV status of sexual partner(s)
  - Have high number of sexual partners
  - Are engaged in commercial sex work
  - Have had recent bacterial sexually transmitted disease
  - Use injections drugs and
    - Share drug equipment, or
    - Have an injecting partner who is living with HIV

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December 2021: Updated CDC guidelines encourage providers to inform *all people who are having sex* that PrEP can protect them from acquiring HIV, offer PrEP to anyone who asks for it

- Desired effect of reducing stigma and increasing awareness about PrEP
- Since its approval, PrEP only reached a small fraction of people in the US who might need it
  - CDC has estimated that only 7 percent of women who could benefit from PrEP were prescribed the drug
When PrEP Is NOT Recommended

• Some reasons *PrEP is not recommended*; having
  – Unknown HIV status (it’s important that only people who test negative for HIV take PrEP)
  – Signs or symptoms of acute HIV infection
  – Decreased kidney function
  – Unknown hepatitis B status and/or vaccination status

• Guidelines suggest providers consider PrEP for people in areas or personal networks where HIV is more common, offer tools to help providers identify these areas

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CDC Recommendations

- While PrEP is designed to be used with condoms or other safer sex measures:
  - Women who cannot or do not use condoms may want to use PrEP instead of condoms
  - Important to understand overall risks and benefits of using PrEP; consider methods of protection from other STIs
- Everyone prescribed PrEP must have negative HIV test
  - CDC recommends people on PrEP be tested every 3 months to make sure they remain HIV-negative
The PrEP Debate

- Many believe it’s a good addition to the prevention toolbox, but others disagree

Concerns about PrEP
- HIV-negative people may not adhere; PrEP won’t be effective
- PrEP will be used in place of condoms or other safer sex measures

Advantages of PrEP
- PrEP can be taken without agreement or knowledge of one's sex partner
- Research has not shown that using PrEP has reduced use of condoms/other safer sex methods
The PrEP Debate

Concerns about PrEP

• Possible side effects
  – Most common: nausea and vomiting
• Occasional serious side effects of Truvada
• Potential for developing resistance

Advantages of PrEP

• Most effects occur among people taking new HIV drug; often go away quickly
• No serious side effects found during PrEP studies
  • Small decrease in bone mineral density in men and transgender women in recent PrEP study

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What Does PrEP Mean for Women?

We now have evidence that PrEP works to prevent getting HIV if taken as prescribed, but **much more work needs to be done** before PrEP can be widely used and accepted

- **Improving health care systems** so people can access and afford PrEP
- Making HIV testing **more widely available**
  - Only people who know they are HIV-negative can use PrEP safely
What Does PrEP Mean for Women?

PrEP is a promising tool that women can use to prevent HIV without their partners' cooperation

- Particularly important when intimate partner violence is a factor; woman may fear violence from partner if she asks them to use condoms
- Many questions remain:
  - Will men refuse condoms if they know their partner is on PrEP?
  - Will women be able to keep PrEP drugs given to them?
    - Some women worry drugs given to them might be taken away, given to another family member who "needs them more"
Considering Taking PrEP?

Questions to discuss with your provider:

• How often—and for how long—do I need to take PrEP? What happens if I miss a dose/several doses?

• What are likely side effects and how will I manage them?

• How often will I need to be tested for HIV?

• How much will the drug cost me?
  – Will it be covered by my insurance?
  – Will HIV tests also be covered by my insurance?
More questions to discuss with your provider:

- Do any of my current medical conditions make PrEP not a good choice?
- Do any of my other prescription medications, OTC drugs, street drugs, herbs, vitamins, supplements have interactions with PrEP drugs?
- What should I do if I become pregnant while on PrEP?
New Developments in the PrEP Arena

• Maraviroc
  – Approved for HIV treatment; PrEP study ongoing

• Islatravir (new type of antiretroviral)
  – Another long-acting form of PrEP under development
  – Could be used as an implant (similar to a contraceptive patch), injection, or monthly pill for HIV prevention, or a weekly pill for HIV treatment
  – Several clinical trials of the drug were put on hold in late 2021 due to safety concerns
• To learn more, and for links to fact sheet featuring more details, please read the full fact sheet:
  – **PrEP for Women**

• For more fact sheets and to connect to our community of women living with HIV, visit:
  – [www.thewellproject.org](http://www.thewellproject.org)
  – [www.facebook.com/thewellproject](http://www.facebook.com/thewellproject)
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