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PrEP for Women

Last updated: July 16, 2025

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

#onewomanatatime

www.thewellproject.org

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What Is PrEP?

PrEP stands for
Pre-
Exposure
Prophylaxis:

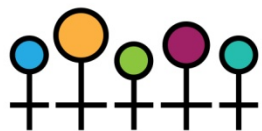


Prophylaxis: Taking medicine ***before*** being exposed to something, to prevent yourself from getting a disease or condition

What Is PrEP?

We use ***several kinds of medicine*** this way:

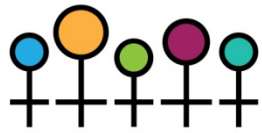
- ***Taking anti-malaria medication*** when we travel to areas where we might be bitten by mosquitoes that carry malaria
 - When medicine is in a person's body before getting a mosquito bite, they are much less likely to get sick from malaria when bitten
- For women, ***taking contraceptive (birth control) pills***
 - Chances of pregnancy greatly reduced when contraceptives are already in a woman's body when exposed to semen during sex
- PrEP: People who are not living with HIV ***take an HIV drug to reduce their risk of acquiring HIV*** if they are exposed to HIV
- Oral (by mouth) PrEP and long-acting injectable PrEP



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How Does PrEP Prevent HIV Transmission?

- CD4 cells infected with HIV become little factories that make thousands of new copies of this virus 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 can keep HIV from making copies of itself
 - Prevents her from acquiring HIV



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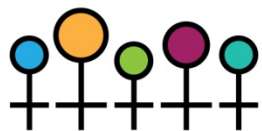
Daily Oral PrEP

July 2012: U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) approved daily Truvada (tenofovir disoproxil fumarate + emtricitabine, TDF/FTC) as PrEP for sexually active adults vulnerable to acquiring HIV

- Truvada also used as part of combination HIV drug treatment
- FDA has since approved Descovy (tenofovir alafenamide plus emtricitabine, TAF/FTC) for PrEP in people assigned male at birth

July 2021: WHO updated guidelines recommend:

- Daily oral PrEP for anyone highly vulnerable to acquiring HIV
- Non-daily oral PrEP for men who have sex with men
- Dapivirine vaginal ring for women
- Each country must approve any drug separately

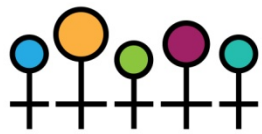


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Long-Acting Injectable PrEP

December 2021: FDA approved long-acting injectable form of the integrase inhibitor cabotegravir for PrEP

- Some people don't want to/cannot take a daily pill
- Apretude (US name): 2 monthly shots, then 1x every 2 months
- Can also be taken daily by mouth before starting injections – ensure no bad reactions to the drug
- Concerns about extremely high cost, especially in countries with high HIV rates
- Drug stays at low levels in body long after stopping injections
 - Studies: especially true in women
 - Higher risk of drug resistance if HIV acquired after stopping or missing injections

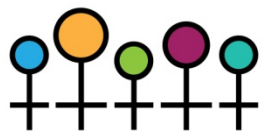


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Long-Acting Injectable PrEP

June 2025: FDA approved ***twice-yearly*** injectable form of the capsid inhibitor lenacapavir for PrEP

- Research found the drug so highly effective at preventing HIV acquisition that studies were stopped early
- Yeztugo (US name): 1 shot along with 2 days of tablets, then 1x every 6 months (26 weeks, +/- 2 weeks *only*)
- Concerns about extremely high cost, particularly in a time of devastating global health funding cuts



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Has PrEP Been Shown to Be Effective?

- **Efficacy shown**

- Oral PrEP *when taken daily as prescribed*
 - More than 90% effective against sexual transmission
 - More than 70% effective against transmission from sharing injection drug equipment
- Not effective among women in southern African studies, but drug wasn't taken as prescribed
- Highly effective as “bridge” for serodifferent couples until partner living with HIV has undetectable viral load
 - U=U: cannot transmit HIV sexually if undetectable viral load and on treatment

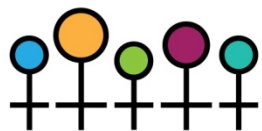


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Why Are Some Research Findings Unclear?

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

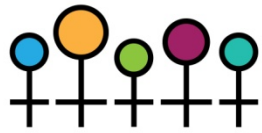


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CDC Guidelines for PrEP Use

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 of PrEP
- PrEP has reached only a small fraction of people in the US who might need it
 - CDC has estimated that only 10 percent of women who could benefit from PrEP were prescribed the drug



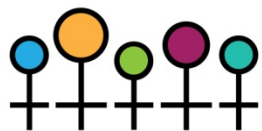
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WHO Guidelines

WHO recommendations are similar to past CDC guidelines, which recommended that PrEP be ***considered for HIV-negative people who are at “substantial risk” for acquiring HIV.***

This includes 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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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
- PrEP should be considered for people in areas or personal networks where HIV is more common
 - CDC offers:
 - Tools, checklists and counseling for providers
 - Information sheets for patients (English, Spanish)

CDC Recommendations

- PrEP must be taken daily to be highly effective
- PrEP is designed to be used with other HIV prevention strategies
- 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
- Pregnant people should talk to their provider about PrEP
 - Especially if in serodifferent relationship
 - Oral PrEP drugs are safe in early pregnancy
 - PrEP can protect HIV-negative partner when trying to get pregnant

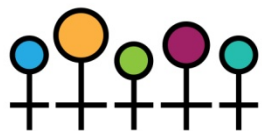
The PrEP Debate

Concerns about PrEP

- HIV-negative people may not adhere; PrEP won't be effective
- Doesn't prevent other STIs
- Potential for developing drug resistance if HIV acquired after inconsistent PrEP use

Advantages of PrEP

- PrEP can be taken without agreement or knowledge of one's sex partner
 - For example if woman can't negotiate condom use because of intimate partner violence

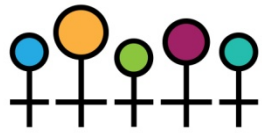


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What Does PrEP Mean for Women?

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

- ***Improving healthcare 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



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What Does PrEP Mean for Women?

Women can use PrEP ***prevent HIV acquisition with or without their partners' cooperation***

- Important if intimate partner violence is a factor
 - Woman may fear violence if she asks partner to use condoms
- Many questions remain:
 - 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:

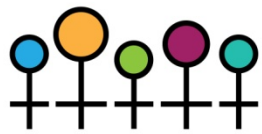
- How often—and for how long—do I need to take PrEP? What happens if I miss a dose/several doses?
- What are likely side effects and how can I manage them?
- How often will I need to be tested for HIV?
- How much will the drug cost me?
 - Will it be covered by my insurance?
 - Will HIV tests also be covered by my insurance?

Considering Taking PrEP?

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, over-the-counter drugs, street drugs, herbs, vitamins, supplements have interactions with the drug?
- What should I do if I become pregnant while on PrEP?

PrEP does not protect against other sexually transmitted infections!



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Learn More!

- 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
 - [@thewellprojecthiv.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/@thewellprojecthiv)
 - www.facebook.com/thewellproject
 - www.instagram.com/thewellprojecthiv/
 - www.threads.net/@thewellprojecthiv
 - www.youtube.com/thewellprojecthiv