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# PrEP for Women

*Last updated: May 3, 2024*

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

#onewomanatatime

[www.thewellproject.org](http://www.thewellproject.org)

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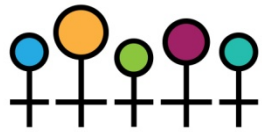
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# What Is PrEP?

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



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



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# What Is PrEP?

We use *several kinds of medicine* this way:

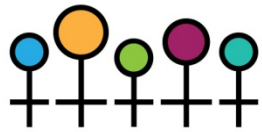
- ***Taking anti-malaria medication*** when we travel to areas where we might be bitten by mosquitoes that carry malaria
  - When medicine is in a person's body before getting a mosquito bite, they are much less likely to get sick from malaria when bitten
- For women, ***taking contraceptive (birth control) 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 injectable long-acting 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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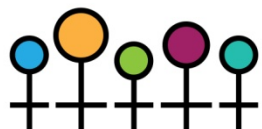
# Daily Oral PrEP

**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

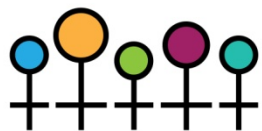


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# Long-Acting Injectable PrEP

**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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# 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



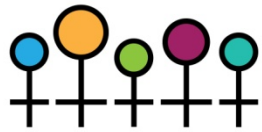


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# CDC Guidelines for PrEP Use

**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:

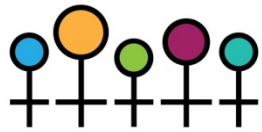
- Are in a sexual relationship with a partner living with HIV
- Don't regularly use condoms/don't know HIV status of sexual partner(s)
- Have high number of sexual partners
- Are engaged in commercial sex work
- Have had recent bacterial sexually transmitted disease
- Use injections drugs and
  - Share drug equipment, *or*
  - Have an injecting partner who is living with HIV



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# When PrEP Is NOT Recommended

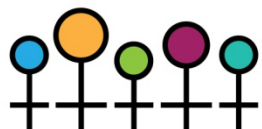
- Some reasons ***PrEP is not recommended***; having
  - Unknown HIV status (it's important that only people who test negative for HIV take PrEP)
  - Signs or symptoms of acute HIV infection
  - Decreased kidney function
  - Unknown hepatitis B status and/or vaccination status
- PrEP should be considered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



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# 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

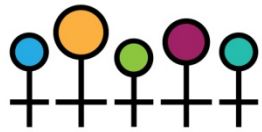
- Many believe it's a good addition to the prevention toolbox, but others disagree

## 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
- Doesn't prevent other STIs

## 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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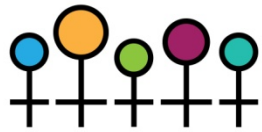
# The PrEP Debate

## Concerns about PrEP

- Possible side effects
  - Most common: nausea and vomiting
- Occasional serious side effects of Truvada
- Potential for developing drug resistance if HIV acquired after inconsistent PrEP use

## Advantages of PrEP

- Most effects occur among people taking new HIV drug; often go away quickly
- No serious side effects found during PrEP studies but:
  - Small decrease in bone mineral density in men and transgender women
  - Small decrease in kidney function

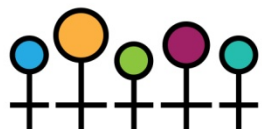


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# What Does PrEP Mean for Women?

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"



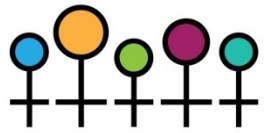


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# Considering Taking PrEP?

## *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?



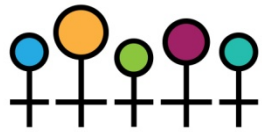
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# Considering Taking PrEP?

## ***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?

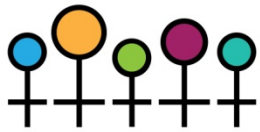
**PrEP does not protect against other sexually transmitted infections!**



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# New Developments in the PrEP Arena

- Maraviroc
  - Approved for HIV treatment; PrEP study ongoing
- Lenacapavir
  - Very long-acting form of PrEP (1 injection every 6 months)
  - Study expected to be completed in 2027
- Dapivirine
  - Vaginal ring approved in South Africa and elsewhere
  - Not approved in US



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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](http://www.thewellproject.org)
  - [www.facebook.com/thewellproject](https://www.facebook.com/thewellproject)
  - [www.twitter.com/thewellproject](https://www.twitter.com/thewellproject)
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