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# HIV Prevention Medications

PrEP



PEP

PIP



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Women's HIV risk is often unrecognized and overlooked, resulting in less awareness about HIV prevention options, especially surrounding HIV prevention medications. Awareness can be impacted by stigma, systemic barriers, and personal circumstances. **This resource is intended for cis and Trans women to increase their awareness of the HIV prevention medications that are available to foster sexual health autonomy.**



### Please Note

WHAI works with cis and Trans women, 2-Spirit, Non-Binary and Gender Diverse people. **This resource is specifically targeted to cis and Trans women due to the science available.**

**The information in this resource is not meant to be taken as medical advice.** It is intended to increase the awareness of women, and workers who support them, about their HIV prevention options. The research on the effectiveness of these medications is constantly evolving. Please talk to a healthcare provider for more information and to discuss in depth what options are best for you.



**WHAI would like to thank our working group and reviewers for their knowledge and contributions to the creation of this resource.**

# What are the HIV Prevention Medications?



HIV prevention medications are types of drug treatments that are prescribed to people who do not have HIV to **prevent HIV infection after a potential exposure** (a situation where there was the potential for HIV to be transmitted to a person who does not have HIV).

PrEP

**PrEP** stands for Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis, and refers to HIV prevention medications **taken before** a potential HIV exposure.



PEP

**PEP** stands for Post-Exposure Prophylaxis, **taken after** a potential HIV exposure.



PIP

**PIP** stands for PEP In Pocket, **prescribed before and taken after** a potential HIV exposure.



# PrEP vs. PEP vs. PIP

	PrEP	PEP	PIP
When do I take this medication?	<b>Before</b> a potential exposure.	<b>As soon as possible after</b> a potential exposure, and no later than 72 hours after.	<b>As soon as possible after</b> a potential exposure, and no later than 72 hours after.
When is this medication prescribed?	<b>Before</b> a potential exposure.	<b>After</b> a potential exposure.	<b>Before</b> a potential exposure.
How long do I take this medication?	Every day for daily PrEP OR every 2 months for injectable PrEP. <sup>1</sup> An on-demand <sup>2</sup> version is approved for Trans women. <sup>3</sup>	Every day for 28 days.	Every day for 28 days.
What form is this available in?	Pills Long-acting injectable	Pills	Pills

<sup>1</sup> The first two injections are one month apart. All following injections are every two months.

<sup>2</sup> On-demand is a form of PrEP that is taken 2 – 24 hours before anal sex and then taken again after. It's not recommended for those who have vaginal sex or who inject drugs and may share drug use paraphernalia. Talk to a healthcare provider about whether on-demand PrEP is a good option for you.

<sup>3</sup> Conditions apply for people on estrogen. Talk to a healthcare provider to learn more.

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## What else you should know...

- ➔ **PEP** and **PIP** are the same prevention method. The only difference is that **PIP** is prescribed **BEFORE** a potential exposure, while **PEP** is prescribed **AFTER**.
- ➔ Because both **PEP** and **PIP** need to be taken as soon as possible after a potential exposure, having **PIP** on hand can reduce barriers people may face when trying to access **PEP** and help to ensure its effectiveness.<sup>4</sup>
- ➔ **None of these prevention tools provide protection against pregnancy or other sexually transmitted and blood borne infections (STBBIs).** Contraception, condoms, harm reduction supplies, and other STBBI prevention tools are still important to use.

<sup>4</sup> <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36564186/>

# When might a prevention medication be helpful?



**Only one prevention treatment should be taken at a time.**

Based on your unique circumstances, one prevention medication may meet your needs better than another. This also means that throughout your life, the prevention medication that's right for you could change.

Generally, **PrEP** is recommended for those who experience more **frequent exposure** to HIV, while **PEP** and **PIP** are recommended for more **infrequent HIV exposures**. On the following page is a list of situations where a prevention medication may be recommended to reduce the risk of transmission.

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*“I was on pre-exposure prophylaxis for a while but was only rarely having sex without a condom. I have an unexpected situation happen probably only one or two times a year, when a condom breaks or isn't used. PIP seemed like a good choice for me because I don't have to take a daily pill like with the pre-exposure prophylaxis, and I can start the medication whenever I need to.”*

- Anonymous

# Recommendations

	PrEP (Oral or Injectable)	PEP	PIP
I have a sex partner living with HIV who has a detectable viral load <sup>5</sup>	✓		
I sometimes don't use a condom	✓		
I have multiple sex partners	✓		
I'm trying to get pregnant with a partner living with HIV who has a detectable viral load	✓		
I had condomless sex		✓	✓
I had a condom break during sex		✓	✓
I sometimes share drug use equipment	✓		
I shared drug use equipment		✓	✓
I've been sexually assaulted		✓	✓
I had a needlestick injury		✓	✓

<sup>5</sup> A detectable viral load means that someone living with HIV would be able to transmit HIV to a sexual partner. Prevention medications and other prevention tools such as condoms and dental dams can significantly reduce the chance of transmission.

# Are these HIV prevention medications effective?



**Research shows oral PrEP to be 90% or more effective when taken consistently and correctly.**

- ➔ **PrEP** is most effective when taken every day at the same time.
- ➔ **PrEP** needs to be taken for at least 7 days for both vaginal sex and anal sex for it to reach high levels of protection.

**Research shows that PEP and PIP is highly effective<sup>6</sup> if taken as prescribed.**

- ➔ For **PEP** and **PIP** to work, you need to start it **as soon as possible** after exposure and no later than 72 hours after.
- ➔ The sooner you start taking it, the more effective it can be.
- ➔ It's very important to take the recommended doses every day, at the same time, for 28 days.

<sup>6</sup> The data around PEP / PIP's effectiveness is based on studies using older HIV medications that show to be 81% effective. Modern HIV medications are much more effective than those used in these studies, so we can estimate that the effectiveness of PEP / PIP today is higher.

# Are these HIV prevention medications safe?



**All the medications used for PrEP, PEP and PIP are safe and have been approved by Health Canada.<sup>7</sup>**

With HIV preventions pills, some people may experience side effects such as nausea, diarrhea, and fatigue, but they usually go away on their own. With injectable PrEP, some people experience pain, swelling, or skin reactions where they got the injection. If you experience side effects that make you want to stop taking your medication, talk to your healthcare provider first as they may be able to help you manage side effects or adjust your medication.



Stopping any of these medications without medical guidance can increase risks, including drug-resistant HIV. It's important to **talk to your healthcare provider if you want to stop your medication.**



## **Can I take PrEP / PEP / PIP if I also take hormone replacement therapy (HRT)?**

All HIV prevention medications are safe to take while on hormone medication. There are some considerations about which drugs are best to take while on HRT. Talk to your healthcare provider to find the right medications for you.

<sup>7</sup> PEP is off-label. This means that the drugs used for PEP are not approved by Health Canada to be used for that specific purpose. However, this does not mean that the treatment is unsafe. Talk to a healthcare provider to learn more about off-label drug use.



## Do I need to attend appointments while taking PrEP / PEP / PIP?

**PrEP** requires medical appointments every 2 – 6 months, depending on the type of **PrEP** being used and your circumstances. At these appointments, you will check in with your healthcare provider about your well-being, discuss any side effects, and complete an HIV test.

Injectable **PrEP** requires two initial appointments that are a month apart. At these appointments, you'll receive an injection of **PrEP**. After this, you'll have to go to appointments every other month for maintenance.

If you take **PEP / PIP**, your healthcare provider may schedule follow-up visits while you're on the treatment to assess your well-being and any side effects. It's also recommended that you complete an HIV test as soon as possible after exposure, 4 – 6 weeks after (right after finishing **PEP**), and at 3 months after (about 2 months after finishing **PEP**).<sup>8</sup>



## Can I take PrEP / PEP / PIP while pregnant and/or breast/chestfeeding?

Most HIV prevention medications are safe to take during pregnancy and while breast/chestfeeding. Talk to a healthcare provider for more information.



## Can I take PrEP / PEP / PIP while taking birth control?

All HIV prevention medications are safe to take with birth control, including the pill, the patch, shot, IUD, etc.

<sup>8</sup> The overall HIV testing guidelines are slightly different and recommend getting tested as soon as possible after exposure, 3 weeks after, and 6 weeks after. To learn more, visit <https://whai.ca/about-hiv/hiv-testing/>

# What do PrEP / PEP / PIP cost?



There are several public and private options for accessing free or discounted PrEP, PEP, and PIP medications. You can work with your healthcare provider or local AIDS Service Organization (ASO) to explore your options for coverage.

OntarioPrEP.ca outlines the options that are available for PrEP coverage. You can find these options by going to [ontarioprep.ca/for-health-care-providers/pay/](https://ontarioprep.ca/for-health-care-providers/pay/).



You can contact the following people to inquire about navigating drug coverage and access to PrEP / PEP / PIP:

- **Karla Fisher**, Toronto General Hospital: [karla.fisher@uhn.ca](mailto:karla.fisher@uhn.ca)
- **Mia Biondi**, Nurse Practitioner: 647-628-6461

PrEPStart is a program that provides **3 months of daily oral PrEP free** for people who do not have a drug plan. Find out more at [ontarioprep.ca/prepstart/](https://ontarioprep.ca/prepstart/).

In cases of sexual assault or a needlestick injury, **PEP may be accessed for free in emergency rooms** or at Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Treatment centres. Find out more through the Ontario Network of Sexual Assault Domestic Violence Treatment Centres at [sadvtreatmentcentres.ca/find-a-centre/](https://sadvtreatmentcentres.ca/find-a-centre/).



# Resources



PrEP for Women - The PrEP Clinic

[prepclinic.ca/backup-online-services/prep-for-women/](http://prepclinic.ca/backup-online-services/prep-for-women/)

Ontario PrEP - Clinic Finder [ontarioprep.ca/clinic-finder/](http://ontarioprep.ca/clinic-finder/)

HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) in Ontario, 2022 - OHESI

[ohesi.ca/hiv-pre-exposure-prophylaxis-prep-in-ontario-2022/](http://ohesi.ca/hiv-pre-exposure-prophylaxis-prep-in-ontario-2022/)

ACCHO: Linking Lives to Care Campaign – list of PrEP clinics and resources in Ontario: PrEP Clinics and resources in Ontario

[accho.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Harm-Reduction-resources-in-Ontario-.pdf](http://accho.ca/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Harm-Reduction-resources-in-Ontario-.pdf)

HIV prevention in African, Caribbean and Black communities | CATIE - Canada's source for HIV and hepatitis C information

[catie.ca/hiv-prevention-in-african-caribbean-and-black-communities](http://catie.ca/hiv-prevention-in-african-caribbean-and-black-communities)

Toronto researchers find that PEP in Pocket allows for autonomy and diversity in HIV prevention | CATIE - Canada's source for HIV and hepatitis C information

[catie.ca/catie-news/toronto-researchers-find-that-pep-in-pocket-allows-for-autonomy-and-diversity-in-hiv](http://catie.ca/catie-news/toronto-researchers-find-that-pep-in-pocket-allows-for-autonomy-and-diversity-in-hiv)

What are the barriers and facilitators to HIV PrEP use among transgender people? | CATIE - Canada's source for HIV and hepatitis C information

[catie.ca/prevention-in-focus/what-are-the-barriers-and-facilitators-to-hiv-prep-use-among-transgender-people](http://catie.ca/prevention-in-focus/what-are-the-barriers-and-facilitators-to-hiv-prep-use-among-transgender-people)

## References

HIV Prevention with Post Exposure Prophylaxis-in-Pocket (PIP), BMJ 2023

Billick MJ, Fisher KN, Myers S, et al. Brief Report: Outcomes of individuals using HIV postexposure prophylaxis-in-pocket ("PIP") for low-frequency, high-risk exposures in Toronto, Canada

Canada's Source for HIV and Hepatitis C Information (CATIE): Study explores self-initiated HIV post-exposure

Ontario HIV Treatment Network

Ontario HIV Epidemiology and Surveillance Initiative

CATIE: Canada's Source for HIV and Hepatitis C information

Canadian guideline on HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis and post-exposure prophylaxis: 2025 update. November 2025.

Patten S, Tan D, Luyombya H, Wilton J, Logie C, Kerr J, Tharao W, Ryan S (2016). ACB Service Provider Perceptions and Understanding of Biomedical Approaches to HIV Prevention.