

What is PEP?

Brown Health Services Patient Education Series

PEP stands for post-exposure prophylaxis. It means taking antiretroviral medicines (ART) after potentially being exposed to HIV, to prevent becoming infected.

- PEP must be started within 72 hours after a recent possible exposure to HIV, but the sooner you start PEP, the better. Every hour counts.
- If you're prescribed PEP, you'll need to take the medication as directed for 28 days. PEP is effective in preventing HIV when administered correctly, but not 100%.
- The risk of an exposure that results in the transmission of HIV from a known HIV positive source is low, (e.g. approximately 1 in 300, or 0.3% from a high risk injury, such as a needle stick).
- Taking PEP medication can reduce the risk of transmission by 80%.

Is PEP right for me?

If you're HIV-negative or don't know your HIV status, within 72 hours, talk to your health care provider or an emergency room provider about PEP, if:

- You think you may have been exposed to HIV during sex
- You had an accidental exposure to blood (e.g. needlestick)
- You shared needles to use/prepare drugs
- You might have been exposed to HIV as a result of experiencing sexual violence.

If there is concern over exposure to HIV as a result of sexual violence, you may have additional concerns besides HIV and there are resources available to you including testing, medical care, support, and/or evidence collection. You can also call the Sexual Assault Response Line at (401)863-6000 for an immediate crisis response.

PEP Facts

- PEP must be started within 72 hrs after a possible exposure to HIV.
- PEP should be used only in emergency situations
- It is not a substitute for regular use of other proven HIV prevention methods, such as safer sex methods like condoms and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP - taking HIV medicines daily to lower your chance of getting infected).
- Continue using condoms and/or dental dams with sex partners while taking PEP, to protect from exposure to HIV again and other STIs
- Barrier methods will also reduce the chances of transmitting HIV to others if you do become infected while you're on PEP.

Does PEP have any side effects?

- PEP is safe but may cause minor side effects such as nausea for a few days.
- Do not stop the medicine without first talking with your provider.

Monitoring and follow-up after an exposure

- Based on the circumstances of your exposure, and information about the source of infection, your provider will make recommendations about testing for other blood borne infections, and/or preventative treatment/vaccines.
- Repeat blood tests may be advised at intervals while taking PEP.
- If you have ongoing exposure to HIV, talk to your provider about continuing HIV prevention medication with PReP, after completing PEP. Truvada can be used as both PEP and PrEP. Descovy is not approved for PEP and not approved for females or transgender males at all.

Contacts

Your care at Brown University Health Services is confidential.

- If you think you might need PEP, call Health Services 24/7 at (401) 863-1330 or go to a nearby emergency room as soon as possible.
- If you have experienced sexual violence, you can call the Sexual Assault Response Line at (401)863-6000.