

PrEP Facts

PREP (PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS)

A PRE-EMPTIVE DRUG TO REDUCE THE RISK
OF CONTRACTING HIV.



VERSION 3.0 2023

This brochure has been produced for those who would like to know more about PrEP, and for those who are considering taking it, or who are already taking it. The brochure is also aimed at healthcare staff who come into contact with, or could come into contact with, individuals taking PrEP.

Are you taking PrEP or thinking about taking it?

WHAT IS PREP?

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (or PrEP) is when HIV-negative people at risk for HIV, take HIV medicines daily to lower their chances of getting infected. PrEP differs from PEP (postexposure prophylaxis), which must be taken within 36 hours after being exposed to HIV.

PrEP does not protect against other sexually transmitted infections or against pregnancy.

Nor can PrEP cure HIV.

PREP IN SWEDEN

PrEP is a combination of two HIV medicines, emtricitabine/tenofovir disoproxil, found in the same tablet (e.g. Truvada®). When we talk about PrEP in this brochure we refer to emtricitabine/tenofovir disoproxil. PrEP is relatively new in Sweden and information and knowledge are being updated continuously.

Emtricitabine/tenofovir disoproxil is found in drugs prescribed for persons with an ongoing HIV infection, but can also be used to reduce the risk of an HIV infection in HIV-negative individuals, in which case it is known as PrEP.

HOW DOES PREP WORK?

Emtricitabine/tenofovir disoproxil contains two different medicines: Emtriva® (emtricitabine) and Viread® (tenofovir disoproxil). In Sweden, the tablet is available in two strengths, 200 and 245 mg.

PrEP blocks an enzyme known as reverse transcriptase, which means that the HIV virus is prevented from replicating itself and establishing an infection in the body.

PrEP is taken orally (by mouth) once a day, and ideally it should be taken with food. It is important to take the tablet around the same time each day, which also means that you develop a routine that will help you to remember to take your medication.

PrEP reduces the risk of contracting HIV through unprotected sex, although it does not offer complete protection. The PrEP user thus takes a calculated risk. PrEP cannot remove the virus from the body of someone who already has HIV.

It is important to take the PrEP tablets each day to ensure the best effect. If you miss a dose, this will increase the risk that HIV will be transmitted.

It is not recommended that you purchase emtricitabine/tenofovir disoproxil online without a prescription, as it is difficult to know that the contents are what they should be (see "How does PrEP work?). Taking counterfeit medicines sold online could mean the desired effect is not achieved, giving you a false sense of security.

More information about emtricitabine/tenofovir disoproxil is available on the FASS website.

HIV test

If you are thinking about taking PrEP, it is important to first take an HIV test. The reason for doing so is to ensure that you do not already have the virus. If you are taking PrEP and you have HIV, there is a significant risk that you will develop resistance. The same applies to hepatitis B, as PrEP also protects against the hepatitis B virus. PrEP must never replace an HIV test!

Timewise, accurate HIV test results can be obtained six weeks after exposure to HIV. Some clinics offer a rapid HIV test (results after 15 minutes), although in that case eight weeks must have elapsed since the most recent exposure to HIV.

SIDE EFFECTS

There is a risk that the PrEP user can experience slight nausea or a headache during the first 4-8 weeks. In the majority of cases any discomfort of this nature will disappear after a couple of weeks, or when medication is discontinued.

More serious side effects related to the kidneys and loss of bone mineral content are unusual, but do occur. Some people could experience an elevated creatinine level. Creatinine is an indicator of kidney function and is measured by means of a blood sample and urine sample. A slight increase does not necessarily mean that you should stop the treatment, although it is important to monitor your creatinine level regularly. PrEP can also have a negative effect on the liver if the user has chronic hepatitis or other liver disease.

There should be no risk of an interaction between PrEP and alcohol. Nor does PrEP have any sexual side effects.

Anyone simultaneously on other medications must remember to inform their health care provider that PrEP is being taken. Medicines can interact with each other.

HOW LONG CAN YOU TAKE PREP?

- PrEP can be taken during different periods in life depending on the needs of the user.
- Some people take the drug as a 'party PrEP', or as an 'on-demand PrEP', i.e. for short periods according to a specific plan.
- For some it is beneficial to take the drug each day, whilst for others 'on-demand PrEP' is better. It is important to discuss with the prescribing physician which is preferable and to adhere to the prescription.
- The drug is most effective if it is taken daily.
- PrEP can be discontinued when the user no longer needs the drug.

At present we do not know very much about the long-term effects of PrEP. There is currently no upper limit for how long you can take PrEP. This is on condition that you tolerate the drug and that you check your HIV status regularly. Quite a lot of research has been carried out on PrEP. Studies have shown that PrEP is highly effective for preventing HIV if it is used as prescribed.

SHOULD A CONDOM STILL BE USED?

A condom is the only protection against both HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Therefore, it is recommended to combine PrEP with condom use during penetrative sex.

If you choose not to use a condom during sexual contact, PrEP still provides increased protection against HIV, although the protection is not 100%. It is important that anyone taking PrEP adopts a carefully considered strategy that has been discussed with the doctor who prescribed the drug.



What does taking PrEP involve?

Taking emtricitabine/tenofovir disoproxil is more than just taking a tablet once a day. If you are taking the drug, what do you need to bear in mind?

BEFORE STARTING:

- Talk to a health care professional who knows about PrEP. What are the benefits and drawbacks? What dosage is best for you?

What are the risks? Are there alternatives?

- Be aware of the risk of side effects.
- Take an HIV test.
- Test for other sexually transmitted infections, including hepatitis B and C.
- It is recommended that you are vaccinated against hepatitis B
- Check your kidney function by means of a blood test and urine test.
- If you are pregnant, or planning to become pregnant, seek advice from family planning clinics or other health care professionals.
- Do you have hepatitis? PrEP can affect your liver. Inform your doctor.

FOLLOW-UP AFTER 1 MONTH:

- Discussion about compliance and potential side effects.

• **If you develop symptoms of primary HIV infection – contact your healthcare provider as soon as possible.** In more than half of cases of people who have an HIV infection, what is termed acute HIV infection, occurs 1-4 weeks from the time of transmission (others do not notice that HIV has been transmitted). Primary HIV infection that gives rise to symptoms often generates a clinical picture that can resemble other viral infections, such as influenza. In the case of acute HIV infection, HIV treatment is commenced immediately to avoid severe damage to the immune system and improve the long-term prognosis.

• In Sweden, PrEP is only prescribed for three months. For prescription to continue, the person in question must take an STI/HIV test. Contact the healthcare staff for further information about the test procedure. **Further information about HIV is available at 1177.se.**

- Test for HIV, chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis, hepatitis B and C.

- Blood and urine test (kidney function).
- Need for a pregnancy test?

CONTINUOUSLY EVERY 3 MONTHS:

- Discussion about compliance, safer sex, and risk reduction.
- HIV test.
- Test for chlamydia, gonorrhoea, syphilis, hepatitis B and C.
- Blood and urine test (kidney function).
- Need for a pregnancy test?

DISCONTINUATION OF PREP:

- Choose an alternative strategy to protect yourself against HIV.
- Test for HIV, hepatitis and STIs (sexually transmitted infections).

Advice to healthcare staff who come into contact with PrEP users

BEFORE STARTING:

- Discuss why the person is taking PrEP or wishes to do so.
- What other safer sex strategies does the person have? Offer condoms.
- What type of help does the person need? Is it necessary to be referred to a specialist?
- Test for HIV, hepatitis B and C.
- ALT, liver test.
- Inform the person about symptoms of primary HIV infection.
- Tests for other STIs (sexually transmitted infections).
- Check the P-creatinine/GFR and urine protein HC/creatinine (urine albumin/creatinine). Urine passed in the morning is sent for analysis the same day.
- Offer vaccination against hepatitis B. (Communicable Disease Control, Region Västra Götaland, will meet the cost of this vaccination for, among

others, individuals who fall into the MSM group, and for individuals who inject drugs.)

- Need for pregnancy test?

FOLLOW-UP AFTER 1 MONTH:

- Discussion about compliance and potential side effects.
- Test for HIV, hepatitis B and C and STIs.
- P-creatinine.
- Urine protein HC/creatinine.
- ALT.
- Pregnancy test?

THEREAFTER EVERY 3 MONTHS :

- Discussion about compliance, safer sex and risk reduction.
- Test for HIV, STIs and hepatitis.
- Blood and urine test (kidney function).
- Need for a pregnancy test?

- Are there suspected side effects of PrEP? Does the person need to be referred to another care provider? What help is she/he looking for?
- Use the time spent with the person to talk about safer sex. Offer condoms.
- Is the person planning to become pregnant? Contact a family planning clinic.

PrEP is relatively new. Health care providers need to stay up-dated about the latest information and research published about PrEP. For further information, go to www.rav.nu

Take care of your health

Anyone who is taking PrEP and who would like to be tested, or if they would simply like more information, can contact Sexualmedicinskt centrum (Centre for Sexual Medicine) in Gothenburg. Sexualmedicinskt centrum cannot prescribe PrEP but can:

- Offer advice on sexual health.
- Offer a test for HIV, hepatitis and other STIs (sexually transmitted infections).
- Offer vaccination against hepatitis B.
- Provide condoms free of charge.

You can also contact your nearest STI clinic (venereology clinic) or infection clinic for tests and information.

The facility that prescribes PrEP also helps with follow-up. In Gothenburg, it is Gayhälsan (Gay Health Clinic) at Sahlgrenska University Hospital that deal with matters related to PrEP and prescribe medication when required.

Healthcare staff are required to maintain patient confidentiality

CONTACT:

Websites: vgregion.se/smc
vgregion.se/ksh

Kunskapscentrum för sexuell hälsa / Knowledge Center for Sexual Health
Västra Götalandsregionen / Region Västra Götaland, March 2023 (version 3.0)