



## Pre-exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP)

### What is PrEP?

“PrEP” stands for “pre-exposure prophylaxis”. “Prophylaxis” means “to prevent”, and the purpose of PrEP is to prevent infection with HIV. PrEP only works as long as you have a sufficient concentration of the drug in your body, if you encounter the virus. For this reason, you must take the medication as prescribed.

It is very important that you first take a HIV test, before beginning PrEP treatment. This is to ensure that you are not already carrying the virus. If you take PrEP while infected with HIV, there is a risk that the virus will become resistant to the drug.

### Why PrEP?

HIV continues to spread globally despite the fact that most people know that consistent condom-use provides a high level of protection against an infection. While PrEP is a complement to condom-use that provides increased protection, it is never a replacement for a condom. PrEP significantly reduces the risk of HIV infection due to unprotected sex, but is not 100 % effective (see below). PrEP provides no protection against other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). For this reason, we recommend that you use a condom together with PrEP.

### Who can take PrEP?

PrEP is mainly recommended for people, primarily men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender, who have a very high risk of coming into contact with HIV and where other preventive measures are deemed to be insufficient. You should consider taking PrEP if you for example:

- often have sex without a condom with casual partners
- use drugs when having sex
- have had other STIs in recent years, especially syphilis or anal chlamydia/gonorrhoea.
- sell or buy sex
- travel abroad and have sex without a condom, with a person from a population with a high risk of HIV

HIV is not transmitted by a partner with a well-controlled and treated HIV infection.

### How does PrEP work and how do you take the medication?

PrEP is a combination of the drugs emtricitabine and tenofovir in one tablet. PrEP blocks an enzyme called reverse transcriptase, which means that HIV is prevented from copying itself and thereby from establishing an infection in the body. The medication should preferably be taken together with food. PrEP offers the best proven protective effect when it is taken daily. When you start PrEP we recommend that you take two tablets at the same time the first day, followed by one tablet a day, at least until your first follow-up appointment after 4 weeks.

PrEP can also be taken “on demand” during periods when a person is exposed to the risk of HIV infection. On-demand treatment means taking two tablets 2–24 hours before sexual contact, and then one tablet daily thereafter for as long as the sexual activity is on-going, and then every day for another 48 hours after the last occasion involving a risk.

The protective effect of PrEP has been investigated in a number of major studies of men who have sex with men (MSM), men who have sex with women and women who have sex with men. All these studies showed that PrEP reduces the risk of HIV infection. In the earliest studies, the risk of HIV infection for MSM was 44% lower among those who took PrEP compared with those who were given a placebo (sugar pills) instead of the drug. This was the average reduction of risk and included people who skipped taking their tablet on some days. Among those who actually took their medication every day, the risk of infection decreased by over 90%. More recent data shows that protection of PrEP against HIV infection can reach levels of 93–99%.

PrEP can cause side effects, and it is important to undergo regular check-ups and testing when taking the drug (see below).

**Certain medications must not be taken together with PrEP.** Therefore, it is important that you tell your doctor which medicines you are taking, including over-the-counter medications, natural remedies and vitamins.

**Which over-the-counter medications can you take together with PrEP?** You can take Alvedon, Reliv, or Panodil to relieve pain or fever. Dimor, Imodium, or Loperamid can be taken for diarrhoea, and Zyrlex, Acura, or Cetirizin for allergies. You can also take Novalucol, Novaluzid, or Rennie for heartburn and excess stomach acid.

#### **Are there any risks associated with using PrEP?**

Some of the participants in the studies developed an upset stomach, a loss of appetite, nausea and headache. These complaints were often mild and temporary. No serious or life-threatening side effects have been observed in these studies, although there are other reports that show a risk of developing reduced kidney function and a modest loss of bone density. If the kidneys are affected during PrEP you may have to stop taking PrEP.

#### **When do I need to attend check-ups during my PrEP treatment?**

If you are taking PrEP, either continuously or on demand, you must attend regular appointments at Gayhälsan / Könsmottagning Sahlgrenska.

To begin with, you must make an appointment for a check-up one month after you begin your PrEP treatment, and then every three months after that. You will undergo blood tests for HIV and tests for other STIs as well as tests to confirm that your body is tolerating the medication well.

If you are interested in vaccination against mpox, please let us know.

**Contact us via 1177 Vårdguiden <https://www.1177.se> or our website [www.sahlgrenska.se/en/ Könsmottagning Sahlgrenska](http://www.sahlgrenska.se/en/Könsmottagning_Sahlgrenska)**