

Emergency HIV treatment (PEP) fact sheet

Do you think you have been exposed to HIV within the last 72 hours?



If yes, you may be able to get treatment to prevent HIV infection.

What is emergency HIV treatment?

Post-exposure prophylaxis, or PEP, is another name for emergency HIV treatment. PEP is not a cure for HIV, it is a form of HIV prevention. It is a short course of antiretroviral drugs that stops exposure to HIV from becoming a life-long infection.

Taking PEP

- PEP can cause side effects such as nausea and fatigue. DO NOT stop taking PEP - talk to your healthcare professional.
- PEP must be taken as soon as possible to be effective and no later than 72 hours after exposure to HIV.
- PEP must be taken at the same time *every day for 4 weeks*.¹

Can I get PEP?

Not everyone is given PEP and it is not available everywhere. A healthcare professional will advise you if they think you should take PEP. Do not assume you will be offered it.

Usually you should only take PEP if...

- it has not been longer than 72 hours since exposure to HIV
- you are not already living with HIV
- a mucous membrane (including: eyes, mouth, vagina, rectum) has had direct contact with someone's bodily fluid that might be infectious
- an open wound has had direct contact with someone's bodily fluid that might be infectious
- the source of exposure is infected with HIV or their HIV status is unknown.²

PEP and HIV testing

It's normal to feel anxious about being infected with HIV. Don't let being worried stop you from getting an HIV test.

- If you took PEP - get tested 3 and 6 months after potential exposure.
- If you didn't take PEP - get tested 3 months after potential exposure.

PEP in pregnancy

Certain PEP drugs can be taken during pregnancy. However, some drugs should not be used for PEP if you are pregnant. Speak to a healthcare professional about your options.

Read AVERT's '[HIV & Pregnancy](#)' fact sheet for more information.

PEP during breastfeeding

PEP can be taken when breastfeeding. PEP reduces the chance of passing HIV to your baby via breastfeeding. Follow the advice of your healthcare professional and national breastfeeding guidelines.

Read AVERT's '[HIV & Breastfeeding](#)' fact sheet for more information.

PEP after sexual assault

If you have been sexually assaulted seek urgent medical help. A healthcare professional will advise you what to do next and they may suggest taking PEP.

Assault is never your fault. You have the right to report it to your local authority if you want to.

You might also need...

- Urgent treatment for other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or blood borne viruses.
- Emergency contraception to prevent unwanted pregnancies:
 - the morning after pill must be taken within 72 hours
 - the intrauterine device (IUD or coil) can be fitted within 5 days of unprotected sex.

Emotional support, advice and counselling

Getting the right support is important before, during and after taking PEP. It can help address any concerns or fears that you might have. Attend follow-up visits with your healthcare team regularly.

PEP must not be used as a frequent way to prevent HIV infection. Use condoms and safer sex practises to prevent sexual transmission of HIV.

Read AVERT's '[Condoms & Lubricants](#)' and '[HIV & Safer Sex](#)' fact sheets for more information.

Where to get PEP?

If you think that you have been exposed to HIV visit a healthcare clinic, doctor or pharmacy immediately.

- You can use [NAM's e-atlas](#) to locate your nearest clinic.

- Contact i-base for [advice about PEP](#).
- Visit AVERT.org for advice and information

Know your rights

You have the right to:

- enquire about PEP
- refuse PEP
- have confidential support and advice
- stop taking PEP.

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- 1. World Health Organisation (2014, December) 'Guidelines on post-exposure prophylaxis for HIV and the use of co-trimoxazole prophylaxis for HIV-related infections among adults, adolescents and children: Recommendations for a public health approach - December 2014 supplement to the 2013 consolidated ARV guidelines'
- 2. AIDS.gov (2015) 'Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP)'

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