Are you PrEPared?

What is PrEP?

PrEP stands for pre-exposure prophylaxis. PrEP is a medication that is taken to prevent HIV. PrEP prevents HIV by working in the body to stop the virus from being able to make lots of copies of itself. If you get exposed to HIV from works, needles, or sex while on PrEP, your chances of actually becoming infected are very low.

How well does PrEP work?

When taken as prescribed, PrEP is highly effective. It has been shown to nearly eliminate HIV risk from sex and reduce the chances of becoming infected from sharing syringes by 74%.

Why is PrEP important for women?

PrEP can be a powerful prevention tool for women because, unlike condoms, women can use it without needing to ask or rely on a partner. Women are at higher risk for HIV than heterosexual (straight) men, so having a strategy just for you is important!

How is PrEP taken?

There are currently 2 types of PrEP. One type is a once daily oral medication. The other is a long-acting injectable medication administered monthly for the first two months and then every other month after that. Both are very good medications that are safe for women to use. Some women have an easier time getting injections every two months than taking a daily pill. A medical provider can help you decide which type of PrEP is right for you.

How safe is PrEP?

Most people don't have side effects with the pills, but if they do, these might include upset stomach or mild headache which normally go away within 30 days of using it. For people who choose injectable PrEP, they may have mild irritation at the injection site. People need a prescription for PrEP and their medical provider will order tests and schedule regular appointments with them to make sure that their body is reacting well to the medicine.

How long does it take for PrEP to start working?

PrEP has to build up in people's bodies before it can work. The CDC recommends that women should take oral PrEP daily for 21 days before being confident it will prevent HIV when risk is from vaginal sex or syringe sharing. It is also recommended that you take at least 6 doses per week. If not, your PrEP might not work for you. For injectable PrEP, it takes about 7 days for PrEP to build up in your body. After two initial loading doses, the medication will be more established in your body and you will begin to get shots every two months. This means until PrEP builds up in your body, you should use other HIV prevention methods like condoms and/or sterile syringes when injecting. Further, It may be important for you to continue to use these tools to prevent Hepatitis C and other sexually transmitted infections.

How long does it take for PrEP to stop working?

For oral PrEP, protection from HIV decreases rapidly after the last dose. If you stop taking your medication, it will stop working within a few days. For women taking injectable PrEP, your first two shots will protect you for about a month. If you stop injectable PrEP, the medication stops working after 2-3 months, but it may not fully clear from your body for up to a year or more.

PrEP and Pregnancy

PrEP does not have an effect on how well birth control works. It is also safe for use by pregnant women and those who are breastfeeding. However, you should talk to your medical provider who can advise you about PrEP.

How do I pay for PrEP?

Most insurance companies including Medicaid will pay for PrEP and the manufacturer will cover the cost of the medication or your prescription co-pays. Women without insurance can get PrEP for free through patient-assistance programs.

How do I get started?

Talk to a medical provider to see if PrEP is right for you. If it is a good option, you will have routine blood tests and testing for HIV, STIs and pregnancy. You may be able to start PrEP the same day you see your provider or very soon afterwards.

What if I have more questions?

Visit https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/prevention/prep.html

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