

HIV Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP)



What is HIV Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP)?

PEP is HIV medicine that is taken within 72 hours after possible exposure to HIV infection. PEP involves taking a 2 or 3 drug combination of HIV medicine for four weeks. Taking PEP may help reduce your risk of getting HIV if you have been exposed to the virus.

PEP medication is usually the same drug as Pre Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP), except PEP is taken after a possible exposure rather than used as prevention.

Who should take PEP?

Anyone who meets specific criteria for possible contact with HIV should take PEP. This may include having sex without a condom, sharing injecting equipment, needlestick injury or other blood exposure. It is important to talk about the need for PEP with a healthcare provider trained in using HIV medicine, or with clinical staff at your local hospital Emergency Department. Tell your healthcare provider if you are pregnant or breastfeeding before you start taking PEP.

When should I take PEP?

It is best to start PEP as soon as possible after you have been exposed. PEP can only be prescribed up to 72 hours after you have been exposed. This gives the medicines and your immune system the best chance to work against HIV.

Where can I get PEP?

In the ACT	
Business hours	Canberra Sexual Health Centre, Building 8, Level 4 Canberra Hospital Phone: (02)5124 2184
After hours	Canberra Hospital Emergency Department, Yamba Drive, Woden
	Calvary Hospital Emergency Department, Haydon Drive, Bruce
	Canberra Afterhours Locum Medical Service (CALMS): 1300 422 567 (There is a fee to use this service).
Outside of the ACT	
Visit: http://getpep.info/get-pep-now/	

How do I take PEP?

The tablets need to be taken at the same time each day. You may need to take them with food. It is important not to miss any doses of PEP.

If you get PEP from a hospital Emergency Department or Canberra Afterhours Locum Medical Service (CALMS), you will get a starter pack so you can begin PEP immediately. This pack only has enough tablets for five days. To continue PEP, you will be referred to Canberra Sexual Health Centre. You will be reviewed and given a script for more tablets which you will pick up from the Canberra Hospital Pharmacy. If you want to complete your PEP treatment you must go to Canberra Sexual Health Centre before you run out of medicine. There is a co-payment for the

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rest of your medicine which you are expected to pay when you pick up the medicines from the pharmacy. As PEP is a specialist medicine, you can't get more from your GP.

Does PEP have side effects?

Yes. PEP can cause side effects like nausea, diarrhoea, headaches, tiredness and a rash. More serious side effects have been reported although these are rare. You should talk about the possible side effects and how to manage them with your healthcare provider.

What else do I need to know while taking PEP?

- Taking PEP will not make you immune to HIV.
- PEP is not guaranteed to stop you from being infected with HIV and it is not a replacement for using condoms and injecting safely.
- You should use birth control to avoid getting pregnant while taking PEP.
- If you miss a tablet, take the dose as soon as you remember. Call Canberra Sexual Health Centre on (02)5124 2184 for advice about how you should continue to take your tablets.
- You need to protect others during the 3-month window period by:
 - using condoms and not sharing injecting equipment
 - not donating blood, sperm, organs or tissue.

Useful websites

- <https://endinghiv.org.au/nsw/stay-safe/pep/>
- For general support regarding HIV and sexuality issues <https://meridianact.org.au/>

References

Australasian Society for HIV Medicine (2016) National guidelines for post-exposure prophylaxis after non-occupational and occupational exposure to HIV. Accessed <http://www.pep.guidelines.org.au/>

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