What is PEP?

Brown Health Services Patient Education Series

PEP stands for post-exposure prophylaxis. It means taking antiretroviral medicines (ART) after potentially being exposed to HIV, to prevent becoming infected.

- **PEP** must be started within 72 hours after a recent possible exposure to HIV, but the sooner you start PEP, the better. Every hour counts.
- If you’re prescribed PEP, you’ll need to take the medication as directed for 28 days. PEP is effective in preventing HIV when administered correctly, but not 100%.
- The risk of an exposure that results in the transmission of HIV from a known HIV positive source is low, (e.g. approximately 1 in 300, or 0.3% from a high risk injury, such as a needle stick).
- Taking PEP medication can reduce the risk of transmission by 80%.

Is PEP right for me?

If you’re HIV-negative or don’t know your HIV status, within 72 hours, talk to your health care provider or an emergency room provider about PEP, if:

- You think you may have been exposed to HIV during sex
- You had an accidental exposure to blood (e.g. needlestick)
- You shared needles to use/prepare drugs
- You might have been exposed to HIV as a result of experiencing sexual violence.

If there is concern over exposure to HIV as a result of sexual violence, you may have additional concerns besides HIV and there are resources available to you including testing, medical care, support, and/or evidence collection. You can also call the Sexual Assault Response Line at (401)863-6000 for an immediate crisis response.

PEP Facts

- PEP must be started within 72 hrs after a possible exposure to HIV.
- PEP should be used only in emergency situations
- It is not a substitute for regular use of other proven HIV prevention methods, such as safer sex methods like condoms and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP - taking HIV medicines daily to lower your chance of getting infected).
- Continue using condoms and/or dental dams with sex partners while taking PEP, to protect from exposure to HIV again and other STIs
- Barrier methods will also reduce the chances of transmitting HIV to others if you do become infected while you’re on PEP.

Does PEP have any side effects?

- PEP is safe but may cause minor side effects such as nausea for a few days.
- Do not stop the medicine without first talking with your provider.
Monitoring and follow-up after an exposure

- Based on the circumstances of your exposure, and information about the source of infection, your provider will make recommendations about testing for other blood borne infections, and/or preventative treatment/vaccines.
- Repeat blood tests may be advised at intervals while taking PEP.
- If you have ongoing exposure to HIV, talk to your provider about continuing HIV prevention medication with PREP, after completing PEP.

Contacts

Your care at Brown University Health Services is confidential.

- If you think you might need PEP, call Health Services 24/7 at (401) 863-1330 or go to a nearby emergency room as soon as possible.
- If you have experienced sexual violence, you can call the Sexual Assault Response Line at (401)863-6000.