

# PrEP: Overview for Patients

## WHY is PrEP important?

In the United States, about 40,000 people were newly infected with HIV in each of the past few years. PrEP is one tool for reducing the risk of getting infected with HIV.

## WHAT is PrEP?

PrEP stands for Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis, and it means taking a medicine before you are exposed to an infection, to prevent that infection. In this case, the infection is HIV. There are other ways of avoiding HIV, including using condoms consistently and correctly, reducing your number of sex partners, not being intoxicated or high around the time of sex, and getting checked and treated for sexually transmitted infections (STIs). PrEP can help people who can't do those things consistently and those who want an additional form of protection. PrEP should not replace these strategies, but it can be used along with some or all of them.

Truvada® and Descovy® are the medications we use for PrEP. Truvada® and Descovy® are often used along with other medicines to treat people with HIV infection, but for PrEP they are used to help block HIV from infecting you if you are exposed to the virus through sex or injection drug use.

Truvada® and Descovy® are taken as 1 pill once daily.

In studies, PrEP was more than 90% effective at preventing HIV in people who took it very regularly, but was not effective in people who did not take it or who take it only sometimes. So, PrEP is highly effective if used correctly, but it is not 100% reliable.

## WHO should consider taking PrEP?

You should consider PrEP if you are a sexually active man who has sex with men, a heterosexual woman or man, a transgender woman or man, or a person who injects drugs, and you have one or more of the risk factors for HIV listed below.

Significant risks for HIV infection include:

- ▶ Using condoms only sometimes or not at all
- ▶ Having more than one sex partner
- ▶ Having an HIV-positive sex partner
- ▶ Having had a recent sexually transmitted infection, such as gonorrhea, chlamydia, or syphilis
- ▶ HIV-positive injecting partner
- ▶ Sharing of injection equipment
- ▶ Engaging in commercial sex work
- ▶ Using stimulants, poppers, cocaine, meth, ecstasy, or GHB in the past year
- ▶ Having taken post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) to prevent HIV in the past year

As you can see, a lot of people have a risk for becoming infected with HIV. If you have even one of these risks, please discuss PrEP with your VA provider. They can help decide whether PrEP is right for you.

Both Truvada® and Descovy® are available at VA. For Veterans who are not eligible for VA care or have a partner who is not a Veteran and needs PrEP, there is a national PrEP donation program. Learn more: [www.getyourprep.com/](http://www.getyourprep.com/)

For more information on PrEP, visit [www.hiv.va.gov](http://www.hiv.va.gov).



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