

When you are considering PEP (Postexposure Prophylaxis) medications

This information sheet covers the most frequently asked questions about taking medications (PEP) for an exposure to HIV. For more information, you can ask the medical provider who will be providing care.

Introduction:

- PEP is not recommended for all exposures to HIV because most exposures do not lead to HIV infection and because the drugs used to prevent infection may have serious side effects. Taking these drugs for exposures that pose a lower risk for infection may not be worth the risk of the side effects. Consultation with a health-care provider is needed before starting PEP.

Why PEP is or is not recommended:

- The effectiveness of PEP in humans is still not clear. One study (1) concluded that an 81% decrease in the risk for infection existed if PEP was completed.
- Animal studies have shown that a primate (monkey) form of HIV (called SIV: simian immunodeficiency virus) was suppressed or delayed when PEP was begun after an exposure.

The PEP Medications:

- The medical provider will recommend that three medications are given for four weeks. It is important to take the medications as prescribed, and for the entire four weeks.
- PEP should be initiated as soon as possible. Ideally the medications should be started within two hours. However it is advisable to start even if more than two hours have elapsed if the exposure meets the criteria for PEP.
- Knowledge about the effectiveness and toxicity of the medications is limited.

Side effects and other considerations while taking PEP:

- Possible side effects to these medications most often include headaches, nausea, vomiting, fatigue, and insomnia, all of which are manageable with the use of other medications. The workers' compensation case manager or the medical provider managing your case will discuss management of side effects with you.
- Be sure to let the medical provider know the names of any other prescription or over-the-counter medications you are taking, and any other medical conditions you have such as diabetes, pregnancy, etc.
- It is possible that the medical provider may change your medication regimen if indicated.
- You may decline any or all PEP medications.

If you take PEP, monitoring during the postexposure period will include:

- Regular visits to the medical provider
- Lab tests will be performed on a regular basis to detect any side effects. The medical provider will discuss the schedule with you.
- It is important that you prevent spreading disease until you have been cleared by the medical provider. Follow the guidelines on the "Bloodborne Pathogen Exposure Follow-Up Instructions" form.

Pregnancy:

- If you are pregnant, you may still consider taking the medications if your exposure was severe and the source was a high risk. Discuss this with your medical provider.