

# Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP)

## 1. What is PEP?

Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) is an emergency medication that is taken for 28 days to prevent Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)\* after a recent and possible exposure. **If you think you were exposed to HIV within the last 72 hours (3 days)**, immediately go to the clinic or emergency room, and ask for PEP. PEP must be started within 72 hours of a possible exposure to HIV; the sooner you start PEP, the better. Every hour counts!

## 2. Who should take PEP?

PEP is for emergency situations for people who do not have HIV or do not know their HIV status. If you answer “Yes” to any of the following questions and it is still within 72 hours of an exposure, talk to your doctor or go to the emergency room for PEP.

- Did you have anal or vaginal sex without a condom with someone who has HIV or unknown HIV status?
- Did the condom break during anal or vaginal sex with someone who has HIV or unknown HIV status?
- Did you share a needle, syringe, or other equipment used to inject drugs with someone who has HIV or unknown HIV status?
- Were you sexually assaulted?

## 3. What are the side effects of PEP?

PEP is safe but may cause some side effects that may include nausea, fatigue, vomiting, headaches and diarrhea. These side effects are usually mild and go away. Talk to your healthcare provider if any of these symptoms do not go away or you start experiencing fever, chills, sore throat, cough, or a rash.

## 4. Does PEP work?

PEP is highly effective at preventing HIV if taken within 72 hours of a possible exposure to HIV and taken for the full 28 days. It's very important to never skip a dose and take all the medication that was prescribed to you. PEP does not protect against other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or pregnancy – **use condoms every time you have sex to help protect against STIs and to lower the risk of pregnancy.**

## 5. How do I get PEP?

PEP should only be used in emergency situations. Visit [GetPrEPLA.com/pep/get-pep-now/](http://GetPrEPLA.com/pep/get-pep-now/) or call 1-844-YEA-PREP to find where you can get PEP immediately. Additionally, if you feel that you might be exposed to HIV frequently, talk to your doctor about PrEP\*\* (pre-exposure prophylaxis), a medication you take to prevent HIV before an exposure.



### Key Points

- PEP can prevent HIV after a possible exposure.
- PEP must be started 3 days or sooner from a possible exposure to HIV.
- PEP is safe and highly effective if taken every day for the full 28 days.

### For more information:

**Los Angeles County  
Department of Public  
Health**

[www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/dhsp/PEP-PrEP.htm](http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/dhsp/PEP-PrEP.htm)

**California Department of  
Public Health**

[www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DOA/Pages/OA\\_prev\\_PrEP.aspx](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/Programs/CID/DOA/Pages/OA_prev_PrEP.aspx)

**Centers for Disease  
Control and Prevention  
(CDC)**

[www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/pep.html](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/pep.html)

**\*For more information on HIV or PrEP, please see the “HIV FAQ” or “PrEP FAQ”.**

DHSP-STD-0038-01 (05/16/2022)