

Emergency PEP: A User's Guide

PEP To Prevent HIV



PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) is emergency medicine that can prevent a new HIV infection.

- Take emergency PEP if you may have been exposed to HIV.
- Start PEP as soon as possible and no more than 72 hours after exposure.
- To start PEP right away, call the 24/7 NYC PEP Hotline at 844-3-PEPNYC (844-373-7692).

Take Emergency PEP Every Day for 28 Days

- There are different medicines for HIV PEP. Ask your health care provider how to take your PEP pills.
- If you miss a daily dose of PEP, take only one dose the next day.
- Take PEP even when you travel or on days you use drugs or alcohol.

To take PEP every day:

- Set a daily reminder on your phone or in your calendar.
- Take PEP before or after a daily activity, such as when you eat breakfast or go to bed.
- Always carry a PEP pill in a pillbox or wrapped in aluminum foil. This way, if you forget to take it at home or your plans change, you will still have PEP with you.

You may be given a “starter pack” with a few days’ supply of PEP pills. Fill your prescription for the rest of the 28 days of PEP as soon as possible. To connect with a provider, call the 24/7 NYC PEP Hotline at 844-3-PEPNYC (844-373-7692).

How PEP Works To Stop HIV

If you are exposed to HIV, it takes a few days for an infection to establish itself in your body. Once you take the first dose of PEP, it begins to stop the virus from multiplying. As you continue taking PEP, cells with HIV die and the virus cannot spread to the rest of your body.

Some NYC clinics provide HIV PEP at no cost to people without insurance regardless of immigration status. No matter your age, you can get emergency PEP without a parent or guardian’s permission.

Check In With Your Provider

Check in with your provider by phone, text, or email so they can make sure you are taking HIV PEP as prescribed.

- Tell your provider right away if you experience fever, swollen glands, or a rash — these may be early signs you have HIV.
- Your provider will test you for HIV when you start PEP, when you finish PEP, and two months after you finish PEP. If you do not finish PEP, you will still need a follow-up HIV test.
- If you want to stop taking PEP, talk to your provider to make sure it is safe to stop.

Address Any Side Effects

HIV PEP may cause mild side effects, including nausea, upset stomach, fatigue, and headaches. These side effects often get better or go away after the first week of taking PEP. Talk to your provider if side effects continue to bother you.

- To prevent nausea, take PEP with a snack or before bed, or both. To relieve nausea, try ginger candy or peppermint tea.
- To reduce gas or bloating, try an over-the-counter gas reliever.
- If soft stools bother you, try a fiber supplement.

You can take PEP if you are pregnant or taking any form of birth control or hormone therapy. Tell your provider if you are breastfeeding before starting PEP.

Take PrEP To Stay Protected Against HIV

After emergency PEP, consider taking PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis). PrEP is safe and effective medicine that prevents HIV and is available as a daily pill or an injection you receive every two months. PrEP does not require emergency care and can protect you if you are exposed to HIV again.

For more information and additional user's guides, visit nyc.gov/health/hiv or scan the QR code.

