



# The Basics of PEP (Post-Exposure Prophylaxis)

## 1. What is PEP?

- PEP is emergency medication that can prevent HIV infection if started as soon as possible, within 36 hours but not beyond 72 hours, after potential exposure to HIV.
- PEP stops HIV exposure from becoming an HIV infection.
- To prevent HIV, take PEP as prescribed for **30 days**.

## 2. Medication Instructions

- There are 30 pills of Tenofovir/Emtricitabine in one bottle and 60 pills of Raltegravir.
- Take Tenofovir/Emtricitabine once a day and Raltegravir twice a day for 30 days.
- Store the bottle at room temperature (not in refrigerator/hot car).
- This medication can be taken with or without food.
- This medication can be taken when drinking alcohol or using drugs.
- Do not share your medication with others.

## 3. Take both pills as prescribed for 30 days

- Only studies of daily dosing have shown PEP to be effective. People who use PEP more consistently are more likely to prevent HIV infection.
- We have **no** evidence that taking more than the prescribed amount per day gives any additional protection. In fact, taking too many can be bad for your health or make you feel sick.

## 4. Getting into a Routine

- Many people find it helpful to take their pills at the same time as something else they regularly do each day (e.g., eating breakfast, brushing teeth).
- Reminders (alarms or seeing the bottle somewhere you look each day) can also help.
- Pill boxes are available if you want to try one.
- When routines are disrupted (e.g., staying out overnight, going on vacation, skipping meals), consider carrying extra pills on you.

## 5. Sometimes Doses are Missed

- People sometimes forget or skip doses. It is not uncommon.
- If you forget a dose, just take it when you remember. For example:
  - *If you usually take in AM, but realize at 10pm that you forgot, it's ok to take 1 pill then and continue with your usual schedule the next day.*

## 6. Potential Side Effects

- Some people experience side effects when starting these medications. This may involve gas, bloating, softer/more frequent stools, or nausea.
- These symptoms are usually mild and go away after one week of taking PEP.
- Strategies to deal with stomach related symptoms:
  - Take pills with food/snack.
- Contact the clinic if you have side effects (see phone number at end of handout). We can help.

## 7. Discussing PEP with others

- People sometimes find it helpful to tell friends or family that they are taking PEP (can help support pill taking).
- Think carefully about whom you might want to tell you're taking PEP (you want it to be someone who will be supportive).
- It's your personal decision. You should not feel pressured to tell anyone.

## 8. Stopping PEP

- Please **do not** stop PEP unless you are called by the clinic and told to stop the medications. Stopping before you have completed the medications **greatly increases** your risk of HIV infection.
- If you are experiencing unbearable side effects, please call the clinic to let us know or go to the Emergency Room if your symptoms feel life-threatening.

**Continued on Reverse Side**





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## 9. After completing PEP

- Once you have completed the 30 days of PEP, you will return to clinic to be re-tested for HIV and other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Please make every effort to return for your appointment.
- You will also need to return to clinic in 3 months and in 6 months for repeat HIV testing.

## 10. Consider PrEP

- Once you have completed PEP, consider pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).
- PrEP is the use of medication to prevent HIV infection BEFORE an exposure to HIV. It has been shown to decrease the risk of HIV infection by up to 99%.

## Questions/Concerns

Call during business hours if you have any questions or concerns, or if you're going to run out of pills before your next visit. If you have an emergency, call 911 or go to the hospital emergency room.

## Additional resources

- [www.getprepla.com](http://www.getprepla.com)
- [www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/dhsp/PEP-PrEP](http://www.publichealth.lacounty.gov/dhsp/PEP-PrEP)
- [www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/pep](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/pep)
- [www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/prep](http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/prep)

**Please note, that this document is for individuals accessing PEP at any of the County of Los Angeles, Department of Public, STD Clinics. If you are accessing PEP at other locations, the medication and instructions may be different. Make sure to consult with your healthcare provider.**

