



## Is PEP effective for women?

**80%** Studies show that PEP can be up to 80% effective at preventing HIV transmission if taken as prescribed.



For PEP to work, you need to start it as soon as possible even though it can be given up to 72 hours after exposure. The sooner you can access it, the more effective it can be.

**28 Days**

It is important to take the doses every day, at the same time, for the entire 28 days.



Missing PEP doses or not taking them as prescribed after you've started might increase your risk of developing drug-resistant HIV.



## Is PEP safe?



PEP was approved in Canada in 1996.



Most drugs used for PEP are safe to use if you're pregnant but breastfeeding/chest feeding while taking PEP is not advised. Talk to a doctor about your options.



If you are a trans woman who takes hormones, older forms of HIV medication may suppress estrogen. Talking to your doctor can help find the right medications for you.



Some people experience side effects such as nausea, diarrhea, and fatigue when taking PEP. If you experience side effects that make you want to stop taking PEP, talk to your doctor first - they might be able to adjust your medications.



## How can you get PEP?

- You need a prescription to take PEP. Because it's important to start PEP as soon as possible, most people go to their local emergency room to get one.
- If you go to the emergency room, tell the staff that you believe you have had an exposure to HIV and need to access PEP as soon as possible.
- Before going on PEP, you will be tested for HIV, pregnancy, other STIs, and medical conditions (like kidney and liver disease) to determine which PEP medications are right for you.
- If you do not have OHIP coverage, you may have to pay out of pocket for your hospital visit and medications. There may be services in your community that can help if you don't have status. Connect with your local ASO or [settlement.org](http://settlement.org) for more info.



## Tips for accessing PEP

- Not every emergency room has the same access to and experience prescribing PEP. Be as prepared as you can be to advocate for yourself.
- If you need support, bring someone you trust such as a friend or service provider with you.
- Be prepared to discuss the details of your exposure. This can be very difficult to do but the more honest and detailed you can be, the more the intake health care provider can understand what happened and get you the care you need.
- It's recommended that you get tested for HIV 3 months and 6 months after your exposure. Ask your doctor about how to plan for follow up steps.
- As PEP's effectiveness is time sensitive, ask where you can get the medications immediately after leaving. If it is outside of pharmacy hours, you can ask if they provide a starter kit for taking the medications prior to picking up PEP from a pharmacy.



# PEP & Women\*

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



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# What is PEP?

## PEP STANDS FOR Post Exposure Prophylaxis

- It is a 28 day, daily course of HIV medications you can take to significantly reduce the risk of HIV infection if you have been exposed to HIV.
- PEP does not provide protection against pregnancy or other sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- PEP is an emergency prevention method. Condoms, harm reduction supplies, and other HIV prevention tools are still important to use.

**PEP is a combination of medications. The three possible drug combinations for PEP that are recommended by the Canadian Medical Association are:**

**1 TDF/FTC\*** + **1 Raltegravir**  
tablet daily      400 mg, twice daily

**1 TDF/FTC\*** + **1 Dolutegravir**  
tablet daily      50 mg, daily

**1 TDF/FTC\*** + **1 Darunavir** + **1 Ritonavir**  
tablet daily      800 mg, daily      100 mg, daily



# When might women\* want to get PEP?



**You can consider getting PEP to reduce the risk of transmission of HIV as soon as possible within 72 hours if you:**

- ✓ had a condom break during vaginal, front hole, or anal sex
- ✓ had condomless vaginal, front hole, or anal sex
- ✓ shared injection equipment
- ✓ have been sexually assaulted
- ✓ have sustained a needlestick injury



PEP is for emergency situations where HIV transmission is significantly more likely. When you go to access PEP, a health care provider will help determine if it is right for you.



# Why is PEP important for women?

## HIV+

Every year, women in Ontario continue to contract HIV.



PEP allows women to take control of their own health in an emergency situation.



In cases where women can't negotiate condom use, including experiences of violence and sexual assault, PEP is something women can access to help prevent HIV.



Among the Ontario women living with HIV who participated in CHIWOS, a longitudinal community-based research study, 18.9% acquired HIV through coercive sex. PEP can play a role in addressing the risk of HIV transmission in these contexts.



# What does PEP cost?



**If you are an Ontario resident with OHIP coverage, the cost of PEP will be covered if you are:**

- ✓ accessing PEP after experiencing sexual assault
- ✓ accessing after occupational exposure
- ✓ if you are under the age of 25

- In cases not related to sexual assault or occupational exposure, PEP can be expensive. If you don't have private drug insurance and are over the age of 25, a month's supply of PEP can cost around \$1,000.
- If you don't have the money to pay for PEP, tell the emergency room staff and ask if they can help you find a way to access PEP at lower or no cost.



# For more information



Contact your local Women & HIV/AIDS Initiative Coordinator.

Visit [whai.ca](http://whai.ca) for contact information.



## NOTES

\*The term 'woman' is used throughout this guide as an umbrella term, meant to encompass a wide range of identities within the women's community, including cis and trans women, women with trans experience, as well as folks on the transfeminine spectrum.

\*TDF/FTC is Emtricitabine/ Tenofovir Disoproxil Fumarate (known as its brand name, Truvada)