

Accessing PrEP Step by Step

a queer guy's
toolkit for effective
self-advocacy in BC



ABOUT THIS TOOL KIT

Since January 2018, PrEP has been available free of charge for most queer guys* in BC. This toolkit was made by and for queer guys to give us the tools to effectively self-advocate for PrEP and our own sexual health. Here you will find information about PrEP and resources to help guide a conversation between you and a doctor. Navigating the healthcare system can be complicated - consider this toolkit a roadmap to getting PrEP!

*we use the term “queer guys” in this toolkit to describe members of our community. This includes gay and bisexual men, trans folks, and Two-Spirit people. Even if you don’t use these terms to describe yourself, this toolkit may be helpful in thinking about PrEP and self-advocacy.

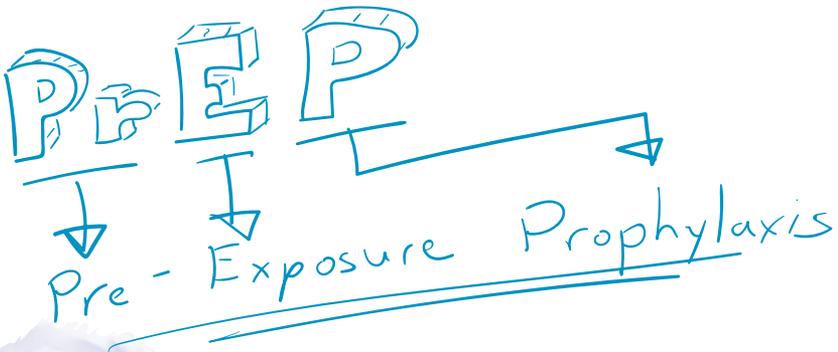
ABOUT THE AUTHORS

The *Investigaytors* are a group of young queer guys committed to improving queer guy’s health in Canada. We meet regularly at the Community-Based Research Centre in Vancouver to learn research and knowledge translation skills and participate in every step of the research process. We developed this toolkit to answer many of the questions we had about accessing PrEP in BC. We hope you find it helpful too!

WHAT IS PrEP?

PrEP = Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis

Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis is an option for those of us who are HIV-negative to prevent HIV. It typically involves taking one pill every day. While PrEP is highly effective at preventing HIV, it does not protect against other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) like chlamydia, gonorrhea, or syphilis. This toolkit explains how to access PrEP in British Columbia (BC).

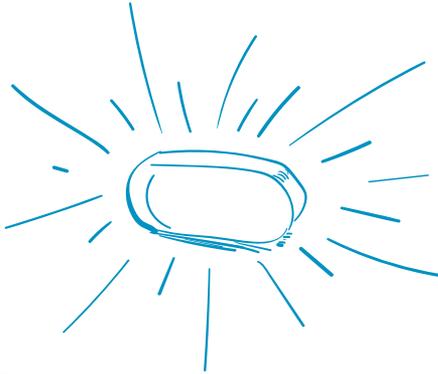


What is PrEP Self-Advocacy?

Self-advocacy involves speaking up for yourself, communicating your healthcare needs, and making informed decisions about your health and wellbeing. When it comes to PrEP, self-advocacy will be particularly important because not all doctors are familiar with the medication or feel comfortable prescribing it right away. Being a strong self-advocate does not mean having all the answers, but knowing what questions to ask and where to seek information.

Accessing PrEP

PrEP is available at no cost for most queer guys in BC through a public program. This means accessing PrEP looks different from getting other prescription medications. For example, there is a standard form your doctor will need to complete to register you in the public program. If you live in Vancouver, you'll have to pick up your PrEP from St. Paul's Hospital. If you live outside of Vancouver, you can arrange for your PrEP to be shipped to a pharmacy or doctor's office near you. These steps are outlined in more detail on page 8-9.



Am I eligible for free PrEP in BC?

Free PrEP is available to queer guys in BC who've had anal sex without a condom and any of the following:

- a HIRI score of 10 or more (HIRI is a brief questionnaire used to estimate your risk for acquiring HIV)
- a syphilis diagnosis in the past 12 months
- a rectal STI (like gonorrhea) in the past 12 months
- used PEP more than once (see page 12 for more info)
- had sex with someone who is HIV positive and not undetectable

If you think you're eligible for PrEP, you probably are!

Taking PrEP: Daily

Most of us who use PrEP take one pill every day. This is the regimen approved by Health Canada. It takes 7 days of daily dosing before PrEP is most effective at preventing HIV. Taking PrEP daily is easy to remember, but if you forget to take a pill once in a while it should still be effective.



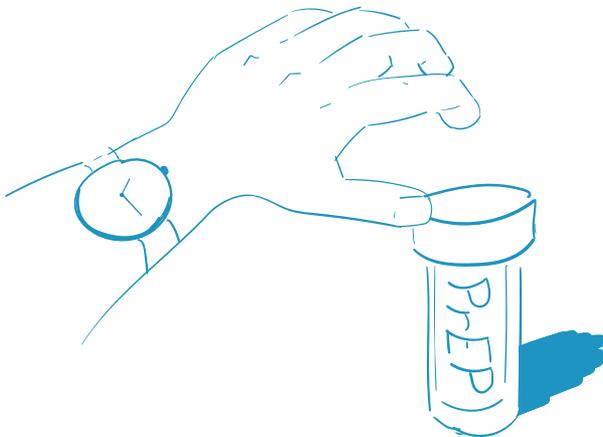
Set a reminder to take your PrEP on your phone.

HOT TIP

Taking PrEP: On Demand

Another way to take PrEP is to use it when you need it. This is called “on-demand” PrEP or “episodic dosing.” While not approved by Health Canada, research shows it is still effective at preventing HIV transmission for those of us who are cisgender. On-demand PrEP requires taking two pills 2-24 hours before sex, and one pill every day until 48 hours after the last sex you have. For example, if you had sex on Tuesday and Thursday, you will take two pills Monday, then one pill every day until Saturday. On-demand PrEP requires that you can predict when you’re going to have sex to take the dose beforehand.

Regardless of how you take PrEP, it will involve regular appointments with a doctor or nurse practitioner. This is important for monitoring your HIV status, checking for STIs, and making sure you don’t have any negative side effects.

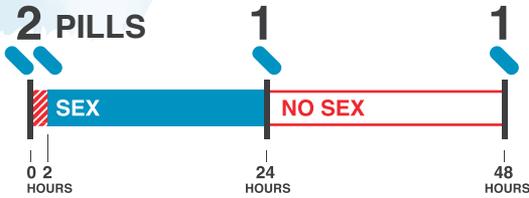


If you’re using PrEP on-demand, some planning might be required because you need to take your PrEP 2–24 hours before you first have sex.

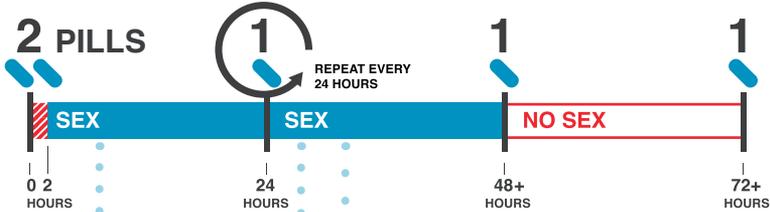
HOT TIP

More about on-demand...

SEX WITHIN 24 HOURS OF THE FIRST DOSE



SEX BEYOND 24 HOURS AFTER THE FIRST DOSE



Tim



Guy from Starbucks

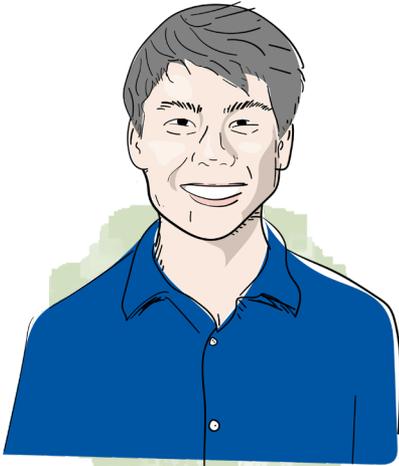
The side effects of PrEP include nausea and upset stomach.

Consider taking your double dose of PrEP several hours before your first hookup to decrease the odds of feeling sick during sex. For example, take your PrEP in the morning if your hookup is in the evening.

HOT TIP

Is PrEP for ME?

Everyone has their own relationship with their sexual health: it's up to you to decide whether PrEP is right for you. To help guide your decision, we created some profiles to show examples of decision-making around PrEP.

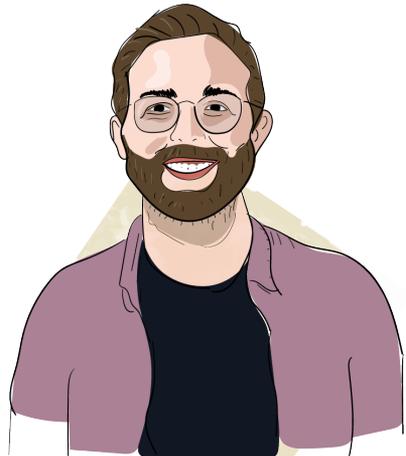


Ryan

My partner and I are monogam-ish. We mostly have sex together, but sometimes have sex with other people when one of us is out of town. We're both HIV negative. We use PrEP on-demand when we expect to have sex with others.

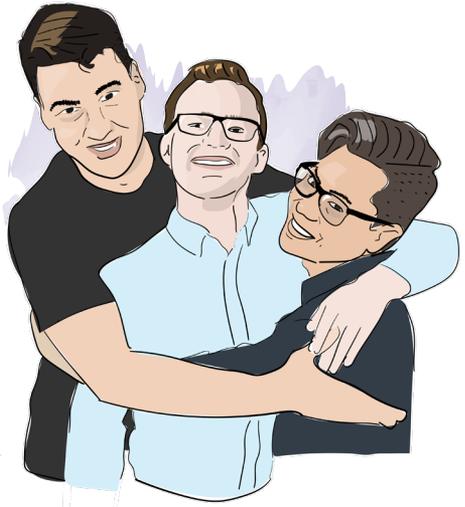
Gary

My partner and I only have sex with each other. My partner has HIV and I don't. Because my partner is undetectable, I decided not to use PrEP since the virus can't be transmitted.



Logan

I have a few regular partners and I enjoy hookups. Sometimes I wear condoms, but not every time, especially if I'm using crystal or GHB. I decided to use PrEP daily because I don't always know when I'm going to get laid. PrEP gives me peace of mind.

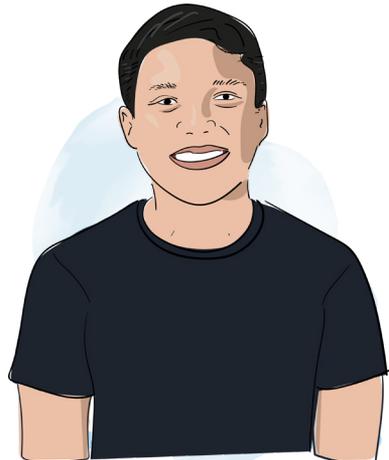


Amar

My partner and I are in an open relationship. We always wear condoms when we play with others. Because we use condoms, I decided not to use PrEP. If the condom breaks, and I might have been exposed to HIV, I know where to access PEP within 72 hours. [See page 12 for info on PEP]

Rahim

I'm single and love having sex. I don't always use condoms, but get tested often. I decided to start using PrEP daily. I might stop using PrEP if I get into a monogamous relationship.



PrEP Pathway

Follow these steps to get on PrEP

1 Visit a doctor or nurse practitioner (NP) to start the PrEP process

They confirm your eligibility by reviewing your medical history and reasons for seeking PrEP.

Find the documents and lab requisitions you can give to your doctor on page 16.

Bringing the documents and lab requisitions to your appointment will speed up the process and make sure you're getting the right tests.

2 Go to a lab for blood tests

This lab visit will confirm your HIV status and kidney function.

These results will get sent to your PrEP prescriber.

Your doctor may arrange another appointment with you to review your lab results and complete the enrollment process.

3 Pick up your 30 day* supply of PrEP!

Your PrEP will be ready in 3-4 days after your doctor submits the paperwork.

If you live in Vancouver, you'll need to pick up your PrEP at St. Paul's Hospital pharmacy.

If you don't live in Vancouver, you will need to arrange for PrEP to be delivered to a pharmacy or doctor's office.

Don't forget to get your lab requisition for your one month visit!

* 44 day supply of PrEP is available for folks outside of Vancouver

4 Go back to the lab at least one week before you run out of PrEP

It's important to monitor your HIV status and kidney health before continuing PrEP.

Your lab results will be sent directly to your PrEP prescriber.

5 Return to your doctor

They will review your lab results and complete a prescription renewal for a 90 day supply of PrEP.

If you didn't get a standing lab requisition for blood tests, you should receive one now.

Make sure you get a full STI screen every visit!

6 Pick up your 90 day supply of PrEP!

In order to pick up your PrEP, you will need to phone St. Paul's Pharmacy to order your medication, unless your doctor has written a pick up date on your prescription.

Call: 1-800-547-3622

* Complete steps 4-6 every time you need a PrEP refill (approx. every 3 months)

See if your doctor will give you the lab requisition to do before your first appointment. This will speed up the process!

HOT TIP

Talking to your doctor: Self-advocacy in action

Any doctor in BC can prescribe PrEP, but the PrEP program is still relatively new and your doctor may not be familiar with it. If you're thinking of using PrEP, you will need to have a conversation with your doctor and may need to put your self-advocacy skills to work.

Quick tips...

- Every doctor is different, and some may want to have a longer conversation about your reasons for using PrEP. Try to think in advance about these reasons, and come prepared to talk about them.
- Your doctor may ask you to fill out a questionnaire called the HIRI-MSM. This involves personal questions about your sex life, including your drug use. It may help to look up the HIRI questionnaire before your appointment so you know what to expect. You could also bring a completed HIRI score to your appointment.
- If you're worried about having this conversation, you can always practice with a friend, or a bring a friend to your appointment. Self-advocacy doesn't mean doing it alone.

HOT TIP

I want to start PrEP to prevent HIV. Are you familiar with PrEP?

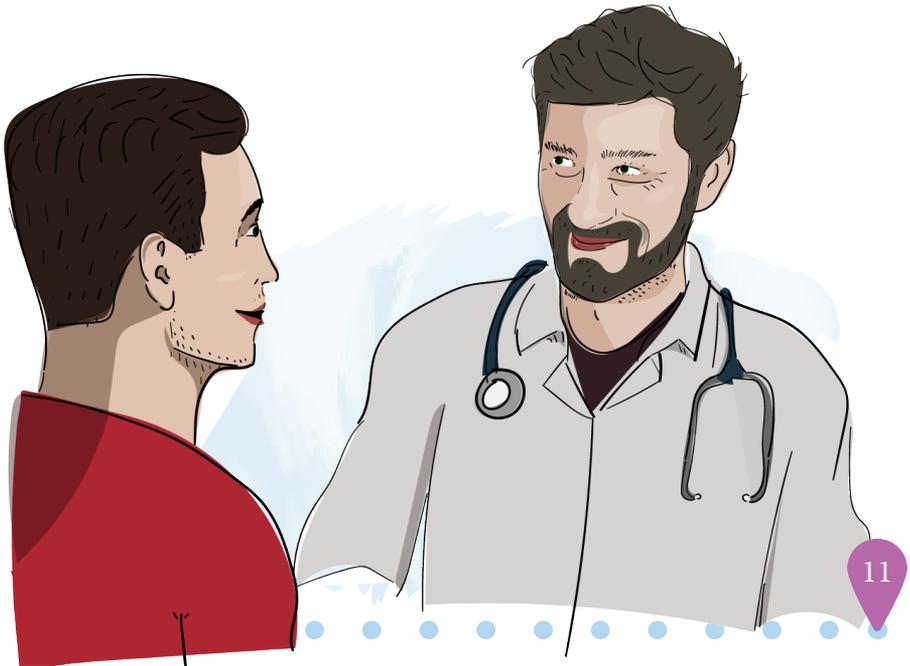
I want to use PrEP because I don't always use condoms with my sex partners, and it is highly effective at preventing HIV.

I will need lab tests, STI screens, and a doctor's appointment every three months to refill my prescription. You will also need to complete some forms to enroll me in the public PrEP program.

Yes, I've heard about PrEP, but, don't know much about it. Why do you want to use it?

Alright, what is required to be on PrEP?

Let's have a look and get started.



Talking to your doctor

Some doctors may be uncomfortable or unwilling to prescribe PrEP. This could be for a number of reasons. For example, they might not believe you are at risk for HIV, they may be unfamiliar with the effectiveness of PrEP, or their clinic might not be able to accommodate appointments every three months for necessary follow-up (as is the case for most walk-in clinics).

It can be discouraging if your doctor is unwilling to prescribe PrEP. If this happens, ask your doctor for a referral to another healthcare provider who would be willing to prescribe PrEP. If you know you want to start PrEP, you could also try reaching out to other doctors in your area.

Do you know about PEP?

If you think you might have been exposed to HIV, and you aren't currently on PrEP, PEP may still help prevent you from acquiring HIV. In order for PEP to work you need to start taking it within 72 hours of exposure to HIV. The earlier PEP is taken, the more effective it is. PEP can be accessed from hospital emergency rooms in BC, as well as from the HIM Health Centre on Davie St. and select other locations in Vancouver:

checkhimout.ca/pep/where-can-i-get-pep/

HOT TIP

How did it go?

We want to know if this toolkit was helpful and how we could improve it. Were you able to access PrEP? Do you still have questions? Please let us know:

<https://ca.research.net/r/PrEPToolkit>

I want to start PrEP to prevent HIV. Are you familiar with PrEP?

I believe I'm a good candidate for PrEP. As part of the public PrEP program, I will receive tests for HIV, STIs, and kidney functioning every three months. Most people don't report any side effects.

Here is a list of the multiple studies that show that PrEP is a safe and effective medication. In the meantime, can you refer me to another doctor or one of your colleagues that would be more comfortable with PrEP?

Yes, but I don't prescribe PrEP as I have concerns about its long-term side effects.

I'm sorry. Until I research PrEP more, I don't feel comfortable prescribing it.



Studies confirm... PrEP works!

One way to be an effective self-advocate is to be informed about your health options.

Research has shown that daily PrEP is at least 92-97% effective at preventing new HIV infection when used correctly and consistently. Guidelines in Canada and the United States endorse PrEP as a powerful strategy for preventing HIV infection. Fewer studies have examined on-demand PrEP, although results from one study showed an 86% reduction in HIV transmission among cisgender men.

There have been several studies that have examined the efficacy of PrEP:

- iPrEx Study: “Preexposure Chemoprophylaxis for HIV Prevention in Men Who Have Sex with Men” Published in The New England Journal of Medicine. 2010.
- PROUD Study: “Pre-exposure prophylaxis to prevent the acquisition of HIV-1 infection (PROUD): effectiveness results from the pilot phase of a pragmatic open-label randomised trial” Published in The Lancet. 2016.
- Ipergay Study: “On-Demand Preexposure Prophylaxis in Men at High Risk for HIV-1 Infection” Published in The New England Journal of Medicine. 2015.



Message from Dr. Mark Hull

“PrEP is an evidence-based HIV prevention strategy endorsed in Canada. All sexually active gbMSM should be assessed for PrEP eligibility. PrEP consists of a once daily medication which is well-tolerated with only very rare renal side effects. Standard monitoring consists of HIV, renal functions, and STI test every three months.”

- Clinical Associate Professor UBC.

Oral pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV consists of antiviral drugs tenofovir (TDF), and emtricitabine (FTC). Health Canada has approved this treatment for daily use among HIV-negative individuals at high risk for HIV. Effective January 1, 2018, access to PrEP in BC is available through the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS (BC-CfE) at no cost to qualifying individuals deemed clinically at risk of HIV infection. Inuit and other individuals who are covered under the federal Non-Insured Health Benefits program may be able to access PrEP through this program.

Quick Facts

- The BC-CfE advises that all HIV-negative gbMSM and transgender people reporting condomless anal sex within the last 6 months should be counselled about PrEP.
- People who use drugs and heterosexual individuals who have an HIV positive partner not on medications may also qualify for PrEP.
- PrEP does not protect against other STIs, therefore other prevention strategies or regular STI testing is recommended.
- Baseline HIV testing is needed to qualify for PrEP, routine HIV testing and renal function monitoring and STI screens are recommended every three months while using PrEP.

Prescribing PrEP

In order to enroll a patient in the publicly funded PrEP program, the patient must complete baseline laboratory work. Once the HIV test results are available, complete the PrEP Enrollment Form (see information below).

Patients starting PrEP must be confirmed HIV-negative and have normal renal function. All patients should be reviewed after an initial 30 day supply (or 44 day supply), followed by regular in-person prescription reviews at least every 3 months. Routine STI screening and treatment should also be performed.

PrEP should be used with caution for those with a history of kidney disease, chronic hepatitis B virus infection, or osteoporosis.

Finally, you must counsel the patient on adherence, risk reduction strategies, and the need to immediately seek medical attention if acute HIV symptoms occur.

Visit the BC Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS website (cfenet.ubc.ca) for the full clinical guidelines on PrEP prescription in BC. Here, you will also be able to access the required patient enrollment, lab requisitions, and prescription refill forms. All patients start with a 30 day supply, followed by a 90-day prescription and regular in-person prescription reviews at least every 3 months.

Current documents and forms are all found at the following webpage:

www.cfenet.ubc.ca/hiv-pre-exposure-prophylaxis-prep/documents

Glossary

HIV PrEP - Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis

Highly effective HIV prevention strategy that involves taking anti-HIV medication prior to and after sex.

Daily PrEP - Daily Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis

Approved regimen by Health Canada that involves taking PrEP every day to significantly reduce the chance of acquiring HIV.

On-demand PrEP - On-demand Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis

Off-label use of PrEP that involves taking two doses of PrEP between 2 and 24 hours before sex, and then one pill daily for two days after sex.

BC-CfE - Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS

Research organization dedicated to improving the health of British Columbians living with HIV through the development, ongoing monitoring, and dissemination of research and treatment programs.

HIV - Human Immunodeficiency Virus

HIV is a virus that attacks the body's immune system. There is currently no cure for HIV, although many of us living with HIV lead long and healthy lives.

STI - Sexually Transmitted Infections

Infections caused by bacteria and viruses that occur through contact with genitals, the mouth, or the rectum. PrEP does not prevent STIs.

PEP - Post-Exposure Prophylaxis

HIV prevention strategy that involves taking anti-HIV medication up to 72 hours after sex, although the sooner the better.

HIRI - HIV Incidence Risk Index

Clinical assessment tool that can be useful to identify individuals at increased risk of acquiring HIV. HIRI is sometimes used to determine eligibility for PrEP. The HIRI scale is available in the BC PrEP guidelines and the BC-CfE Assessment Tool. See link on page 16.

GBMSM - Gay, Bisexual and Other Men who have Sex with Men



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