



Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis for HIV Prevention

At YouthCO, we believe PrEP works, stigma doesn't.

YouthCO believes all youth must have access to sexual health information and care that is sex-positive, inclusive and innovative. As youth, we recognize that there are many different ways that we take care of our sexual health, and that no one way is right for all of us. At YouthCO, we work to provide youth with information that is relevant to our lives and helps us to embrace our sexuality and make sexual health decisions that are right for us. We recognize that sexual desires and possibilities, as well as interpersonal and structural barriers, impact the way we navigate sex and substance use. We also know that each of us has different beliefs and behaviours when it comes to condom use, sexual activity, and injection drug use.

Research has demonstrated that pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) works: daily use of the HIV medication Truvada reduces the risk of acquiring HIV.^{i,ii,iii,iv} YouthCO regards PrEP as a new option that may work for some of us over the age of 18^v who do not always use condoms, and have sex with partners whose HIV-status we don't know or whose HIV status is positive. YouthCO supports those of us over 18 who are seeking PrEP as an option alongside or instead of additional HIV prevention methods. We also believe PrEP needs to be part of a suite of HIV prevention options, including inclusive, ongoing sexual health education, decreased stigma towards communities most affected by HIV, and affirming, empowering individual supports.

Access to PrEP will help to reduce the transmission of HIV. While PrEP works, many of us cannot access this new prevention option because of various forms of stigma, the cost of the medication itself, and the challenges of accessing sex-positive health care providers. Further, many of us who could most benefit from taking PrEP are not aware of this option. All of these barriers minimize the impact PrEP can have in reducing the impact of HIV on British Columbia's youth. These barriers can also make it hard for us to use additional HIV prevention methods such as condoms, HIV/STI testing, information and supplies to inject more safely, and HIV-related programming.

Although YouthCO is optimistic about the role PrEP can play in preventing new HIV diagnoses, its potential is limited to those individuals who are able to access PrEP. **We need improved access to PrEP, and PrEP cannot be the only strategy we use to reduce the impact of HIV on British Columbia's youth. It is crucial that we address the very real ways stigma and social inequities limit access to HIV education, treatment and prevention as part of how we approach PrEP.**

YouthCO calls on policy makers, funders, and health care providers to consider the following recommendations.

To reduce the impacts of HIV on our communities, we, British Columbia's youth, need:

1. Comprehensive sex education that empowers us to make informed decisions about our health and foster positive relationships.
2. Consistent access to free condoms, lube, HIV/STI testing, HIV/STI treatment, and sterile injection equipment without judgement for all people.
3. Consistent access to non-judgemental and responsive health care providers to monitor our HIV/STI-related risks, medication side effects, adherence and overall wellbeing.
4. Safe and affirming communities, schools, and workplaces, free of stigma that drives HIV transmission.
5. Access to PrEP as part of a nationally-funded, universal, pharmacare program to ensure all of us can get the medications we need.

We encourage ongoing research to answer unresolved and unexplored questions about PrEP use among trans men, and to determine the feasibility of event- and time-driven PrEP prescriptions which may be more acceptable, affordable, and accessible to British Columbia's youth.

We support the recommendation in the 2014 Provincial Health Officer's report to continue to determine the feasibility of PrEP as an HIV prevention tool.^{vi} As a PrEP research and implementation strategy is developed, YouthCO recommends a sex-positive and anti-oppressive approach to ensure PrEP rollout and use supports increased education, decreased stigma, and inclusive communities.

If you have any questions or concerns related to PrEP, feel free to contact us at YouthCO:

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ⁱ US Public Health Service, 2014 – Preexposure Prophylaxis for the Prevention of HIV Infection in the United States: A Clinical Practice Guideline. Available online via <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/pdf/PrEPguidelines2014.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ World Health Organization, 2014 – Consolidated Guidelines on HIV Prevention, Diagnosis, Treatment and Care for Key Populations. Available online via http://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/10665/128048/1/9789241507431_eng.pdf?ua=1&ua=1

ⁱⁱⁱ Therapeutic Guidelines Committee, British Columbia Centre for Excellence in HIV/AIDS, 2015 - Guidance for the use of Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) for the prevention of HIV acquisition in British Columbia. Available online via http://www.cfenet.ubc.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/centredocs/prep_guidance_tgc_dec2014.pdf

^{iv} James Wilton, 2014 – Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis. Available online via <http://www.catie.ca/en/fact-sheets/prevention/pre-exposure-prophylaxis-prep>.

^v The US Food and Drug Administration approved Truvada for use with adults, but this recommendation does not include a specific age range. However, the clinical guidelines developed by the CDC caution health care providers against prescribing PrEP to those under 18 years of age. See endnote i for the complete reference.

^{vi} BC Provincial Officer of Health, 2014 – HIV, Stigma and Society: Tackling a Complex Epidemic and Renewing HIV Prevention for Gay and Bisexual Men. Available online via <http://www.health.gov.bc.ca/pho/pdf/hiv-stigma-and-society.pdf>.