

**PEP.** Post exposure prophylaxis is a four week course of anti-HIV drugs. It could stop you – or someone you've had sex with - getting HIV after unsafe sex or if a condom breaks.

**ACT FAST.** PEP can only work if started as soon as possible after HIV gets inside the body.

> **How PEP works.**

If HIV gets into someone's bloodstream it takes time before the virus permanently infects them. Starting PEP during this short period of time can kill the virus before this happens.

> **Act fast!**

PEP has the best chance of working the sooner it's begun. Within **24 HOURS** is best but it can be given up to 72 hours (three days) after. The longer the wait, the more chance PEP doesn't work. After 72 hours PEP is unlikely to work at all so it's not usually offered. Someone might get it if it's a few hours after this deadline but not if it's longer.

> **No guarantee.**

PEP isn't guaranteed. Some people take it and for various reasons it doesn't work and they end up HIV positive. This is mostly because they:

- wait too long before taking it (starting within 24 hours is best)
- don't take the pills for the full 28 days or exactly how the doctor tells them.

> **Side effects.**

PEP can cause:

- headache
- diarrhoea
- feeling sick and vomiting.

Some people find these so bad they have to have time off work or give up taking PEP.

Side effects can be reduced by a doctor prescribing drugs to help with diarrhoea and sickness or by changing the HIV drugs in your PEP prescription.

Side effects stop as soon as someone finishes PEP.

> **PEP is no 'morning after' pill.**

Someone on PEP has to take the pills every day for 28 days – not just once after sex.

> **PEP is no cure for HIV.**

It can only get rid of HIV if taken very quickly after the virus gets in someone's body. If someone has had HIV longer than this the drugs can't get rid of HIV because it's in parts of the body the drugs can't reach.

> **PEP is not to be used instead of condoms.**

**PEP ...**

- costs hundreds of pounds (the Health Service pays, not the person taking it)
- is hard to get
- has side effects
- needs to be taken for a month, and ...
- can fail.

**But condoms ...**

- are cheap
- are easy to find
- have no side effects
- are used only while sex lasts, and ...
- are better at stopping HIV than PEP is.

A doctor decides if someone gets PEP. But you can get condoms whenever you want.

**Keep this leaflet.**

**It might be needed one day – by you, someone you have sex with or a friend.**



## > Where to get PEP?

PEP isn't given by family doctors (GPs). The best thing is to go to a large hospital, if possible one that treats lots of people with HIV.

**If it's not a weekend or public holiday ...** go to a GUM clinic (sexual health clinic) or a specialist HIV clinic.

**During weekends or holidays ...** go to the Accident & Emergency ('A&E') department of a hospital (they never close).

At the hospital say you think you (or the man you've had sex with) have been at risk of getting HIV and want to see a doctor about Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP, pronounced 'pep', not 'pee eee pee').

## > What if there's a problem?

If you're told to go away and come back another day explain you can't because the treatment must be started straight away.

You might be told:

- PEP doesn't exist
- it isn't available on the NHS,
- or is only for hospital staff.

Politely but firmly say that's not correct and ask to speak to the 'on-call HIV doctor' (if there is one).

If you can, before going to the hospital print out and take with you the letter at [www.tht.org.uk/binarylibrary/cmosperecommendations.pdf](http://www.tht.org.uk/binarylibrary/cmosperecommendations.pdf)

This might help - it's an official letter telling hospitals they should make PEP available to people at risk.

If you're still refused PEP go to another hospital if you can. Call **THT Direct on 0808 802 1221** - they can tell you which hospitals give out PEP.

## > Am I sure to get PEP?

If you find a hospital that gives PEP, a doctor decides who gets it depending on what kind of sex happened, who with and when.

PEP is often recommended after anal sex without a condom and may be given after oral sex if an HIV negative man swallows another man's semen. A doctor might prescribe it in other situations too.

You can see if it's worth asking for PEP by filling in an online questionnaire at [www.pep.chapsonline.org.uk/self\\_assessment.asp](http://www.pep.chapsonline.org.uk/self_assessment.asp)

You can also ring THT Direct and talk to someone about whether the risk was big enough to make PEP worth thinking about.

## > Questions the doctor will ask.

A doctor will want to know about:

- the person you had sex with (to help decide what chance they had HIV or not)
- the sex you had (anal, oral, who fucked who, did either of you come inside the other, etc).

## > HIV test.

Before getting PEP someone must agree to an HIV test. This checks that they don't already have HIV. If they do, PEP is a waste of time. It's also not the right treatment for someone who has HIV. Someone not willing to be tested won't be given PEP.

## > Need more answers?

If you have other questions about PEP or want to talk about staying safe you can speak to someone at:

**THT Direct on 0808 802 1221**  
(10am-10pm weekdays, midday until 6pm weekends).

Or check out [www.chapsonline.org.uk/pep](http://www.chapsonline.org.uk/pep)