

HIV Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP)



What is post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP)?

You have been prescribed post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) as a preventative treatment. PEP can reduce the risk of developing HIV infection after possible exposure to the virus. PEP is not licensed for this type of use but in certain circumstances its benefits outweigh any possible risks.

PEP is usually taken for four weeks and should be started as soon as possible after exposure to HIV. You have been given a three day starter pack and you will need to make an appointment to attend the Sexual Health Hub at the Royal Cornwall Hospital for follow-up and more supplies if required. It is important that you telephone the Sexual Health department on 01872 255044 on the next working day to make this appointment.

How should I take my PEP?

For PEP to work properly, it is important to start the tablets straight away and to take them as instructed below:

- Raltegravir – take ONE tablet TWICE a day (every 12 hours)
- Truvada – take ONE tablet ONCE daily (every 24 hours).

Follow the instructions on the labels carefully:

- swallow your tablets whole with plenty of water
- do not chew or crush them
- take your tablets at the times indicated.

If you forget a dose, take it as soon as you remember and then continue as before. If you have trouble remembering to take medicines, use an alarm, for example on your mobile phone.

Whilst taking PEP, and until after your post-treatment HIV test:

- use a condom for intercourse
- **do not** give blood
- only drink the recommended safe limit of alcohol.

What about other medicines and medical problems?

You must tell your doctor about any medical problems, and about any other medicines you take, or start to take, whether these are prescribed or bought over the counter. There is a risk of problems developing if you are taking other medication, or if you have other medical problems (such as kidney or liver problems).

Some medicines known to interact with PEP include:

- Rifampicin
- antacids (omeprazole, ranitidine for example). These are not usually a problem, but let your doctor know if you take these.

Remember, do not:

- take more than your recommended dose
- give your medicines to anyone else
- breast feed while taking PEP.

Keep your PEP in a cool, dark, dry place and out of the reach of children.

Are there any side effects?

Yes, although uncommon. Side effects include:

- nausea (feeling sick)
- vomiting
- diarrhoea
- headache
- tiredness
- weakness
- muscle aches.

These usually settle if you keep taking your medicines as directed. Painkillers, or tablets to prevent sickness or diarrhoea may help. If your symptoms persist, contact a doctor in the Sexual Health Hub on 01872 255044.

Serious side effects are rare, but include:

- allergic reactions
- liver toxicity
- reduced production of:
 - red blood cells (causing anaemia), or
 - white blood cells (which make catching infections more likely).

Regular blood tests will be done to check your blood counts and for liver problems. Tell your doctor if you are concerned about any new symptoms.

How should I manage any side effects?

Side effects	What you should do
Feeling sick, stomach pains, wind, diarrhoea	Take the tablets with food, it often settles. Tell your doctor if it persists or becomes distressing. For sickness, you will need to ask your doctor for anti-sickness tablets. For diarrhoea, take Loperamide (available over the counter).
Headache, joint pains, muscle aches	Take a simple painkiller such as paracetamol or Ibuprofen. Tell your doctor if it persists.
Difficulty sleeping, tiredness, dizziness, confusion	Take care driving or operating machinery. It may go away. Tell your doctor if it persists.
Skin rash	Tell your doctor if it persists.
Cough, nasal irritation, runny nose	Tell your doctor if it persists.

Rare side effects	What you should do
Tiredness associated with shortness of breath	Tell your doctor, this could be due to anaemia.
Fever associated with feeling unwell and other symptoms	Tell your doctor, this could be due to a low white cell count.
Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)	Tell your doctor, this could be due to liver toxicity

What if I am pregnant?

Research shows that it is safe to take PEP after 12 weeks of pregnancy. However, we have less information about its safety in early pregnancy. Therefore you must:

- tell your doctor if you could be pregnant
- avoid becoming pregnant, or fathering a child while taking PEP
- avoid unprotected sexual intercourse.

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If you would like this leaflet in large print, braille, audio version or in another language, please contact the General Office on 01872 252690

