

Spotlight on Health

Preventing HIV: PrEP and Laboratory Testing

People with HIV can now live essentially normal lives thanks to so-called “anti-HIV” drugs. However, the HIV epidemic is not over. Too many people still get the infection.¹ Fortunately, a treatment is available that can reduce the chances that a person will get HIV.² This treatment is called HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).

This newsletter will explain PrEP and why laboratory testing is important for people on PrEP.

Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis

PrEP involves taking a drug called Truvada® daily. This drug is a combination of 2 anti-HIV drugs (emtricitabine and tenofovir disoproxil fumarate). For a person who does not already have HIV, this drug stops HIV from entering cells and multiplying.³ If the virus cannot enter the cells, the person remains HIV negative.

For people at risk of HIV because they inject illegal drugs,² PrEP reduces the risk of getting HIV by more than 70%. For people at risk of getting HIV from sex,² PrEP reduces the risk by more than 90%. Using condoms helps lower the risk even more.²

Who Is PrEP For?

PrEP is for people who don't have HIV but who are at high risk for getting it. Some examples are²

- Men who have sex with men
- People in an ongoing sexual relationship with a HIV-positive partner
- People who have sex with partners who are at risk of having HIV
- People who inject drugs
- People who have recently had another infection that is spread sexually (such as gonorrhea or chlamydia)

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has made recommendations about who should receive PrEP. They can be seen at CDC.gov/hiv/basics/prep.html.

Laboratory Testing Before Beginning PrEP and While on PrEP

Laboratory tests should be done before a person begins PrEP, and while they are on PrEP.^{2,3} The first test is for HIV. A person needs to be HIV negative to start PrEP. For people who already have HIV, taking PrEP can make the infection resistant to anti-HIV drugs. Tests for liver infections and other sexually transmitted infections (see Sidebar on this page) are also important. These infections are more common in people with HIV. PrEP can harm the kidneys in some people, so tests of kidney function are needed. Women also need to have a pregnancy test before beginning PrEP, because it is not known if PrEP can cause harm to a fetus.

According to the CDC, people on PrEP should be tested for HIV and pregnancy every 3 months, and for kidney function and sexually transmitted infections every 6 months.²



Infections and Health-Related Problems Associated With HIV

Hepatitis C and hepatitis B are more common in people with HIV than in the general population⁴:

- One of every four people with HIV also has hepatitis C.
- One of every ten people with HIV also has hepatitis B.

People with HIV are also more likely to have some other medical conditions. These include problems with the heart and blood vessels, liver and kidney disease, some cancers, problems with the nervous system, shingles, and other infections, such as herpes and tuberculosis.⁵⁻⁷

How Your Healthcare Provider Can Help

Your healthcare provider can explain the benefits and risks of PrEP, and help you make an informed decision about whether PrEP is right for you. To provide the best advice, they need clear and honest information about your medical history, your sexual history, and if you inject illegal drugs. If you decide to start PrEP, your provider can order the recommended lab tests.

How the Laboratory Can Help

Quest Diagnostics offers all of the testing recommended by the CDC that needs to be done before beginning PrEP, and while on PrEP.

Additional Information

For more information, visit Quest Diagnostics at KnowaboutHIV.com, or these helpful websites:

- **CDC:** [CDC.gov/hiv/basics/](https://www.cdc.gov/hiv/basics/)
- **Avert:** [Avert.org/hiv-transmission-prevention/prep](https://www.avert.org/hiv-transmission-prevention/prep)
- **MedlinePlus:** [Medlineplus.gov/hiv.html](https://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/hiv.html)

References

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