

Oral Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) Counselling Guidelines



Counselling Should:

- **Be sensitive, inclusive, and non-judgmental**

Recognize that behaviour change is difficult and human beings are not perfect

- **Be presented as a personal choice**

Counselling should support the client in making a personal choice based on their needs and desires.

- **Problem solve and foster motivation**

Offer choices and tangible solutions; identify small wins and achievable next steps in reducing risk.

- **Be client-driven and based on their needs, resources, and preferences**

Counselling should be interactive and tailored to the client's specific needs and lifestyle.

- **Be brief**

10-15 minute check-ins about experience with PrEP and sexual health protection plans are most effective; longer (~30 minute) sessions may be necessary at the first PrEP consultation or if specific issues arise.



health

Department:
Health
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

A photograph of two young women with curly hair embracing each other outdoors. The image is overlaid with a solid blue color. In the top right, there is white, hand-drawn style text. In the bottom right, there is a dark blue rounded rectangle containing white text.

WE ARE
THE GENERATION
THAT WILL END
HIV

Is PrEP Safe?

PrEP is very safe. PrEP is also safe with alcohol and drugs, as well as contraceptives and other medicine.

Why this PrEP counselling job aid was created:

HIV-negative people interested in PrEP should receive counselling prior to PrEP initiation and at follow-up visits while they are actively taking PrEP. This is a quick reference guide to support consistent counselling efforts and provide helpful reminders for important topics to cover. It is a supplement for existing counselling practice and guidelines, not a comprehensive replacement.

What is PrEP?



PrEP = NEW + SAFE + HIV Prevention Method

PrEP is a new and safe method for HIV-negative people to reduce their risk of becoming infected. It is a pill that has 2 anti-HIV medicines: 200 mg of emtricitabine and 300 mg of tenofovir. HIV-negative people who take PrEP **every day** can lower their risk of HIV by more than 90 percent.

PrEP

is the use of an ART medication for HIV negative people for HIV Prevention.

Things you need to know:

How long does it take for PrEP to work?



After taking oral PrEP for 7 days you are fully protected, but you must continue to take it daily to remain protected.

PrEP is an extra HIV prevention option and, where possible, should be used in combination with other prevention methods. Other prevention methods include:



Condoms



Counselling



PEP



Healthy
lifestyles



STIs
Treatment



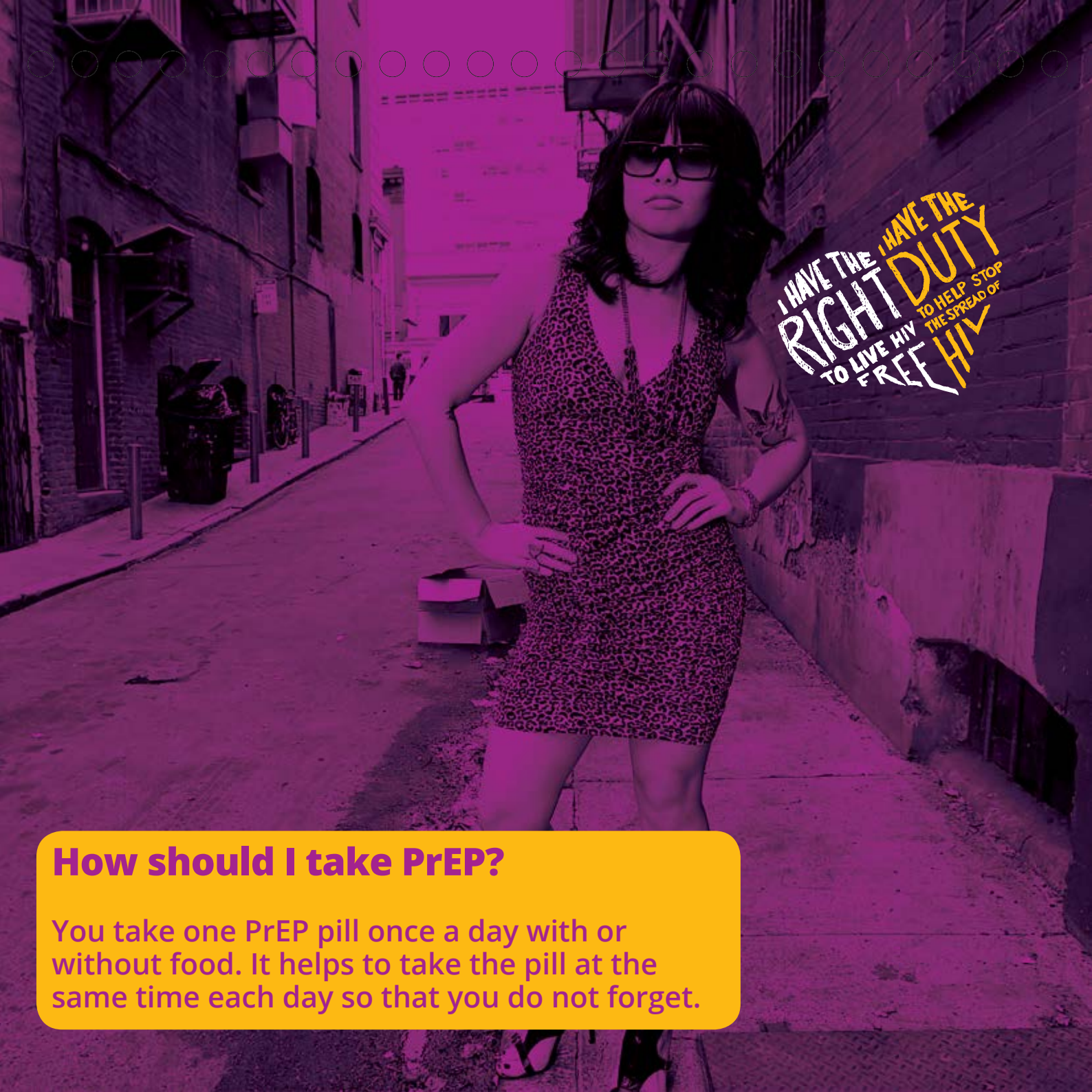
MMC



ART for partners
living with HIV

PrEP does not:

PrEP does not provide immediate protection—it must be taken daily for 7 days before it offers full protection, and should continue to be taken daily. It does not prevent any other sexually transmitted infections or pregnancy. PrEP does not protect you from HIV after exposure.



How should I take PrEP?

You take one PrEP pill once a day with or without food. It helps to take the pill at the same time each day so that you do not forget.

Checklist

Counselling Prior to PrEP Initiation

This is a list of important topics to discuss with the client when explaining PrEP for the first time and deciding whether it might be right for him or her. It is not comprehensive. Please ensure you use your organisation's available counselling tools for each of these topics.

✓	What to discuss:	How to discuss it:
	Assess his or her risk profile	Develop a clear picture of the client's risk profile and lifestyle; make sure he or she understands how their lifestyle impacts their risk profile. IMPORTANT: use your organisation's risk assessment tools.
	Combination prevention	Taken daily, PrEP is an additional prevention option. It should be used in combination with other prevention tools, like condoms, PEP, healthy lifestyles, treatment for STIs, male medical circumcision, and ART for partners living with HIV. REMEMBER: counselling should highlight that ideally PrEP should be used with condoms.
	Condom negotiation	Some clients, especially sex workers, may not be able to enforce condom use. Provide guidance on how to safely advocate for condom use by the partner. IMPORTANT: does your organisation have a tool that can help you?
	STIs	PrEP does not protect against STIs. Regular testing for STIs is encouraged, regardless of PrEP use. REMEMBER: STIs may increase the risk of HIV acquisition.
	Contraception / Fertility goals	PrEP is not a contraceptive. PrEP is safe to use with all contraceptive methods. Consult with a physician to provide guidance on how to proceed if the client becomes pregnant.
	Adherence (daily)*	For PrEP to be effective, the pill must be taken every day. Adherence counselling is critical for full HIV protection. *More detail is provided in the Adherence section that follows.
	Side effects	Some people get mild side effects when they start PrEP, but they generally go away after a few weeks. The most common side effects include: nausea, headache, tiredness, diarrhea, depression, abnormal dreams, vomiting, rash, problems sleeping, and changes in appetite.
	Intimate partner violence (IPV)	People who have abusive or controlling partners may find it more difficult to take care of their sexual health and to adhere to PrEP. Ask about the client's relationships, and for clients experiencing abuse, provide counseling and referrals, when possible.
	Talking to your partner, family, friends, etc.	Deciding whether to tell anyone about your PrEP use is a completely personal decision. Some people find it helpful to tell friends or family for support and to provide reminders to take the pill daily. Discuss with the client whether and how they would like to discuss PrEP with loved ones and how to overcome any potential barriers to gaining their support.
	Visit schedule	Explain the visit schedule for PrEP use. The client must return for follow-up visits at the first month, and then every three months. They must also return to the clinic monthly to pick up their pills.



THE WE ARE
GENERATION
THAT WILL END
HIV

**What happens if I forget to take
PrEP for a day?**

If you missed a pill, take it as soon as you remember, and continue to take daily as before.

Checklist Follow-Up Counselling

Follow-up sessions will most likely be brief. It is critical to review adherence during these discussions and re-evaluate the client's risk profile if he or she has experienced lifestyle changes. Please ensure you use your organisation's available counselling tools for each of these topics.

✓	What to discuss:	How to discuss it:
	Re-assess his or her risk profile	Discuss any lifestyle changes that may affect the suitability of PrEP use.
	Combination prevention	Touch base with the client's sexual health plan and make sure he or she has access to other prevention resources, as appropriate.
	STIs	PrEP does not protect against STIs. Regular testing for STIs is encouraged, regardless of PrEP use. IMPORTANT: If your client presents with an STI, they will need additional counselling.
	Contraception / Fertility goals	PrEP is not a contraceptive. PrEP is safe to use with all contraceptive methods. Consult with a physician to provide guidance on how to proceed if the client becomes pregnant.
	Adherence (daily)*	For PrEP to be effective, the pill must be taken every day. Adherence counselling is critical for full HIV protection. *More detail is provided in the Adherence section that follows.
	Side effects	Touch base about the client's experience with side effects. REMEMBER: If side effects are serious, please involve a doctor with your client's care.
	Intimate partner violence (IPV)	People who have abusive or controlling partners may find it more difficult to take care of their sexual health and to adhere to PrEP. Ask about the client's relationships, and for clients experiencing abuse, provide counseling and referrals, when possible.
	Talking to your partner, family, friends, etc.	Deciding whether to tell anyone about your PrEP use is a completely personal decision. Some people find it helpful to tell friends or family for support and to provide reminders to take the pill daily. Discuss with the client whether and how they would like to discuss PrEP with loved ones and how to overcome any potential barriers to gaining their support.
	Visit schedule	Explain the visit schedule for PrEP use. The client must return for follow-up visits at the first month, and then every three months. They must also return to the clinic monthly to pick up their pills.

Group counselling sessions can be a great way to impact social behavior and address issues relating to adherence, empowerment, self-efficacy beliefs, and stigma.



I HAVE THE
RIGHT
TO LIVE HIV
FREE

I HAVE THE
DUTY
TO HELP STOP
THE SPREAD OF
HIV



Can I share PrEP with other people?

**No, it is important not to share
your PrEP pills.**

Adherence Counselling

Adherence is critical to provide protection against HIV.



Suggest methods to remind the client to take the pill every day

For example:

- Take the pill at the same time every day;
- Incorporate it into your daily activities, like part of your morning routine or when a favourite TV show comes on;
- Set a phone alarm;
- Encourage partners, family members or friends to remind you;
- Use daily pillboxes



Discuss what to do if a pill is missed – take it as soon as remember

Remember: Supporting pill-taking should be honest, direct, and non-confrontational

Steps to follow:

1. Assess how pill taking is going for PrEP client
2. Positively affirm client to support provider/client relationship
3. Identify a motivator to support effective pill taking
4. Provide PrEP education regarding effective use and effectiveness of PrEP
5. Identify barriers to effective use
6. Provide realistic strategies to address barriers
7. Discuss use of other HIV prevention measures that are relevant to situation
8. Client leaves with realistic and achievable plan to increase or sustain use

Adherence
means taking
the PrEP pill
every day.

Daily PrEP
can be taken with
alcohol, drugs,
contraception, etc.
It does not react
negatively with any
normal day to day
activity.

WE ARE
THE GENERATION
THAT WILL END
HIV



THE 2000
GENERATION
THAT WILL END
IT ALL

Supportive Counselling Messages



“let’s talk”

Examining Risk Profile

- ☐ “Let’s look at your risk and options to prevent HIV.”
- ☐ “Let’s talk about how PrEP fits into your risk reduction efforts.”

Considering PrEP

- ☐ “PrEP is a great way to prevent HIV, but it isn’t for everyone.”
- ☐ “Taking a pill every day for ongoing protection from HIV might not be for everybody, but PrEP is an excellent and much-needed extra prevention method for people at high risk of getting HIV.”
- ☐ “The use of PrEP is supported by South African medical experts, the South African government, and many international experts.”
- ☐ “You’ve decided to use PrEP as a way to protect yourself and that’s great.”
- ☐ “If you start PrEP, you do not have to take it for the rest of your life.”

Combination Prevention

- ☐ “PrEP is a great way to prevent HIV, but it doesn’t protect against other STIs or prevent pregnancy.”
- ☐ “Using condoms and PrEP together will give you the best level of protection from both HIV and other STIs.”

Discussing Adherence

- ☐ “Pill taking isn’t easy and takes some practice, especially if you aren’t used to taking pills.”
- ☐ “It’s okay to not be perfect at taking your pills; it takes time. But remember in order for PrEP to work, you have to take your pills regularly.”
- ☐ “I’m here to help by working with you to figure out a way to make taking your pills easier, so that you get the most protection you can.”



A photograph of two young women in a crowd. The woman on the left is wearing a black halter top and has her tongue sticking out. The woman on the right is wearing a blue baseball cap, a black t-shirt with the text 'BOYS NEED US GIRLS' in white, and is also sticking her tongue out. They are both smiling. The background shows other people in a crowd.

How long do you take PrEP?

You take PrEP for as long as you feel at risk for HIV infection. It is not a lifelong medication. Speak with your doctor if you decide PrEP is no longer right for you.

I HAVE THE RIGHT TO LIVE HIV FREE
I HAVE THE DUTY TO HELP STOP THE SPREAD OF HIV

Quick Answer Reference for FAQs during Counselling

Knowledge of PrEP

Q: How should I take PrEP?

A: You take one PrEP pill once a day with or without food. It helps to take the pill at the same time each day so that you do not forget.

Q: How long do you take PrEP?

A: You take PrEP for as long as you feel at risk for HIV infection. It is not a lifelong medication. Speak with your doctor if you decide PrEP is no longer right for you.

Q: Do I have to use condoms while taking PrEP?

A: PrEP is an extra HIV prevention option and where possible, should be used in combination with condoms.

Q: How do I store my PrEP medication?

A: PrEP should be kept in a cool, dry place, away from children, in a tightly closed container.

Q: Can I share PrEP with other people?

A: No, it is important not to share your PrEP pills.



You don't have to use the exact same words - these are just factually correct statements that can help you get the PrEP message across.

Drug Interactions

Q: Can I take PrEP if I use drugs or alcohol?

A: Yes, PrEP is safe with alcohol and drug.

Q: Can I use PrEP and contraception together?

A: Yes, PrEP can be taken with any kind of contraception.

PrEP Adherence

Q: What happens if I forget to take PrEP for a day?

A: If you missed a pill, take it as soon as you remember, and continue to take daily as before.

Q: When and how can I stop PrEP?

A: If you decide PrEP is no longer useful, discuss stopping with a healthcare provider. You will get information for how long after you should continue to make sure you are properly protected.

PrEP and Pregnancy

Q: What must I do if I become pregnant while taking PrEP?

A: Inform your clinician and together you will discuss how to proceed.

Drug Resistance Fears

Q: If I seroconvert while on PrEP, will I be resistant to ARVs?

A: If you are on PrEP and still get HIV the health care providers will do some tests to determine why you seroconverted. It does not necessarily mean that you will be resistant to ARVs. (ex: window period, low adherence, infected with TDF resistant virus, etc)

Service Delivery

Q: Where is PrEP available?

A: Currently in South Africa, PrEP is being provided through a limited number of service delivery sites.

A Black man with a beard and short hair is shown in profile, looking towards the left. He is wearing a dark leather jacket. The background is a warm, yellowish-orange gradient. Overlaid on the right side of the image is the text "THE ONE GENERATION THAT WILL END HIV" in a white, hand-drawn, chalk-like font. The text is arranged in four lines, with "THE ONE" on the first line, "GENERATION" on the second, "THAT WILL END" on the third, and "HIV" on the fourth.

THE ONE
GENERATION
THAT WILL END
HIV

Do I have to use condoms while taking PrEP?

PrEP is an extra HIV prevention option and where possible, should be used in combination with condoms.