

Patient Information Sheet

You have been given medication (Post-Exposure Prophylaxis- PEP) after possible exposure to HIV infection in an attempt to prevent infection with this virus. Please read carefully the following information and ask any questions before you leave the A&E department.

Are the drugs the same as the ones taken by people with HIV?

Yes, it's the same 'combination therapy' that's taken by HIV positive people.

Is PEP is a cure for HIV?

There's no cure for HIV. PEP can only stop an HIV infection if taken very early on after HIV's entered the body, before the infection takes hold - within the first 72 hours (3 days). Once HIV infection takes hold and the infection becomes permanent then anti-HIV drugs can't get rid of HIV from the body. This is because the virus is now in parts of the body that the drugs can't reach. So once HIV permanently infects someone the drugs can usually control the HIV in their body but can never get rid of it completely.

But if HIV is in the body isn't it too late and the person's now infected?

No. After HIV gets in someone's bloodstream it takes time (hours or a few days) before it permanently infects them. If someone acts in that short time they stand a chance of stopping HIV before the infection takes hold.

How could the infection be stopped?

Taking 3 anti-HIV drugs everyday for 4 weeks might stop the HIV before it gets a permanent hold in the body. PEP's not a 'morning after' pill that's taken just once - it's one month of drugs.

So, on PEP someone won't become HIV positive?

Research seems to show PEP makes infection with HIV a lot less likely. But PEP doesn't work every time - some people who take it still end up with HIV afterwards. It can fail because some anti-HIV drugs don't work against some strains of HIV. And it's more likely to fail if it's not taken properly or soon enough.

How soon?

The quicker PEP is started the better - within hours. The longer the wait the more chance it won't work. After 72 hours (3 days) PEP usually isn't given because studies show it's unlikely to work by then.

Does PEP have side effects?

Yes, it can cause diarrhoea, headaches, feeling sick and vomiting. You can have some tablets to control some side-effects e.g. nausea and vomiting, diarrhoea. Because of the side effects some people taking PEP need time off work or study and some have to stop taking PEP. Side effects go once someone stops taking the drugs. One Australian study showed among people taking PEP, side effects were mild to moderate for 2 out of 3 people and severe for 1 in 4. If you do have any possible side effects please inform your GP or doctors in GU Medicine clinic.

Treatment may interact with other medication

Nelfinavir interacts with many drugs. Some of the interactions could be life threatening.

Please **INFORM THE DOCTOR OF ANY OTHER MEDICATION**

YOU TAKE, including your GP, Chemist or herbal treatments. Barrier methods of contraception (condoms) should be used until the outcome of this incident is known, in order to protect your partner as well as avoiding pregnancy.

If you already, or may be pregnant, you should discuss the safety of these medicines with the doctor on-call. If you are not pregnant, you should avoid becoming pregnant whilst taking this treatment by using a barrier method of contraception (condom).

If someone's taking PEP does that make them immune to HIV while they're on it or once they've stopped taking it?

No. Unsafe sex while taking PEP could let more HIV into your body, making PEP much more likely not to work. If after taking PEP someone's stayed HIV negative and then has unsafe sex again, they can become infected just like any other HIV negative person.

If someone takes PEP can their body become resistant to HIV drugs so that the drugs won't work if that person later gets HIV?

No, it's the virus (HIV), not someone's body that can become resistant to the drugs. If PEP works it gets rid of the virus – and the virus can't become resistant because it's not there anymore. So if someone were to get HIV later and needed drugs it wouldn't make any difference that they took PEP in the past. But if PEP doesn't work and a person then ends up infected, there may be problems with the HIV in their body being resistant to some drugs, including ones used in PEP.

How many times can someone have PEP?

Doctors decide who gets PEP and they're unlikely to give these expensive and powerful drugs to the same person time after time. So someone who keeps having unsafe sex will usually be offered help with having safer sex and won't be given PEP lots of times. Besides, the side effects often put people off wanting to take PEP more than once. If one day I feel I (or someone I've had sex with) might have been at risk of getting HIV what can I do?

Things to remember about PEP

- **PEP might stop a person getting infected with HIV**
- **It must be started as soon as possible after unsafe sex or a condom not working - and definitely within 72 hours (3 days)**
- **It means taking anti-HIV drugs for 4 weeks**
- **Side effects are common and can be nasty**
- **It's not guaranteed to work**

Follow up arrangement

Please contact your local GU Medicine clinic as soon as possible to obtain further supply of the medication and follow up appointment. You need to mention that you are taking the medication and need to be seen as soon as possible.

Local GUM clinics

Basingstoke	The North Hampshire Hospital	01256 313333
Bournemouth	Royal Bournemouth Hospital	01202 704537
Guernsey	The Orchard Centre, St Martins	01481 232626
Isle of Wight	St Mary's Hospital	01983 534958
Portsmouth	St Mary's Hospital	023 9286 6796
Salisbury	Salisbury District Hospital	01722 410069
Southampton	Royal South Hants Hospital	023 8082 5438
Weymouth	Weymouth Community Hospital	01305 762682
Winchester	Royal Hampshire County Hospital	01962 824269