
During the COVID-19 pandemic, health care providers should minimize in-person encounters for nonurgent care and continue to provide access to pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and emergency post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) to prevent HIV.

General Guidance
- Provide clinical services via telephone or video conference, when possible.
- Encourage patients to use mail-order pharmacies or delivery services to order PrEP.
- Share this guidance and tips for enjoying safer sex, through mass emails or individual sessions with patients.

Starting Patients on PrEP
Initiating PrEP typically involves an in-person visit for counseling, screening and specimen collection. Providers can use the strategies below for alternatives to clinic visits. Patients can also order PrEP online for home delivery.

Prescribing PrEP
Providers can discuss a patient’s interest in taking PrEP via telephone or video conference.
- Tenofovir disoproxil fumarate-emtricitabine (TDF/FTC) remains the first-line regimen for PrEP. Tenofovir alafenamide-emtricitabine (TAF/FTC) may benefit patients who have impaired renal function or who are at risk of osteopenia or osteoporosis.
- During the COVID-19 pandemic, providers may prescribe 90 days of medicines to patients taking daily PrEP. Guidelines recommend initially prescribing 30 days of PrEP.
- Taking PrEP on demand, only before and after sex, is an option to daily dosing for cisgender men who have sex with men and are taking TDF/FTC. TAF/FTC should not be used on demand given the lack of data for this dosing schedule.

HIV Testing
Before beginning PrEP, patients should be screened for existing HIV infection with an antigen/antibody test.
- Patients who in the past 90 days have had symptoms of HIV infection or possible HIV exposure should still take an HIV antigen/antibody test before starting PrEP.
  - Patients can provide blood for antigen/antibody testing at a commercial laboratory near their home.
- Patients who in the past 90 days have not had symptoms of HIV infection or possible HIV exposure may screen themselves for HIV antibodies using a home test kit. Patients can obtain a home test kit using one of the options below:
  - Clinics can sign up with the NYC Home Test Giveaway to have HIV home test kits shipped to eligible patients free of charge.
  - Patients may purchase a home test kit at a local pharmacy or online.
STI Screening
Ask patients about sexually transmitted infection (STI) symptoms, including dysuria and anogenital discomfort, ulcers and rash.

- Follow [NYC guidance](#) on syndromic management by treating STIs presumptively and prescribing oral medicines when possible.
- Counsel PrEP patients who have not recently had laboratory-based three-site STI screening that they may have asymptomatic STIs that they could transmit to others.

Hepatitis B
Delay hepatitis B screening unless urgently necessary.

- Patients starting PrEP are typically screened for hepatitis B antibodies and surface antigen to determine if they should be vaccinated or if an active infection can be simultaneously treated with TDF/FTC.
- Patients with liver disease may be at elevated risk of severe COVID-19 and should take extra precautions to [avoid exposure to COVID-19](#).

Following Up with Patients on PrEP
Unless a patient requires an in-person visit, follow up every three months by telephone or video conference to:

1. Assess PrEP adherence
2. Ask about side effects of medicines and symptoms of acute HIV and other STIs
3. Refill prescriptions

Providers can also discuss the potential for COVID-19 transmission and [how to reduce the risk](#) with patients who want to have sex with a non-household partner.

HIV and STI testing
PrEP patients who are adherent to PrEP and get tested every three months can reduce in-person testing to every six months.

- **HIV**: Patients can receive a [home test kit through their clinic](#) or purchase one at a pharmacy or [online](#).
- **Other STIs**: Based on symptoms and possible exposure, [treat presumptively](#) and prescribe oral medicines when possible. Patients who require in-person evaluation or injectable treatment can get care at select [NYC Sexual Health Clinics](#) ([see below for more information](#)).

Testing for Renal Function
Screen for serum creatinine and creatinine clearance three months after PrEP initiation and then every six months. Patients can provide a blood sample at a commercial laboratory near their home.
Refilling Prescriptions
Provide patients with a 90-day supply of PrEP unless they have paused their PrEP use.

Pausing or Reducing PrEP Use
Patients who have sex less frequently during the COVID-19 pandemic may want to discuss taking a break from daily PrEP.

- **Taking PrEP on demand**: Cisgender men who have sex with men and are taking TDF/FTC can conserve their supply of medicines by taking PrEP on demand, before and after sex.
- **Pausing PrEP**: Cisgender men who have sex with men and are taking TDF/FTC should continue to take PrEP until at least two days after they last had sex. Others, including cisgender women and people taking TAF/FTC, should continue PrEP for seven days after they last had sex.
- **Restarting PrEP**: People who have not had sex or injected drugs since stopping PrEP do **not** need an HIV test. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, people who have receptive vaginal sex or inject drugs need to take PrEP for 21 days to achieve maximum protection. Cisgender men who have sex with men taking TDF/FTC can restart PrEP by taking two pills, two to 24 hours before sex.

Emergency PEP
People can receive emergency PEP without a visit to a clinic or emergency room by calling the 24/7 NYC PEP hotline at 844-3-PEPNYC (844-373-7692).

- Qualified patients will receive an electronic prescription for a full 28 days of PEP medicines and a home self-test kit for baseline HIV testing.
- Patients requiring an in-person consultation will receive a starter pack of PEP medicines and an appointment at a nearby clinic that is seeing patients for PEP.
- The NYC PEP hotline or an affiliated clinic will arrange follow-up consultation to discuss medication adherence and possible side effects.
- The hotline also provides home kits so patients can test themselves after completing PEP.

NYC Sexual Health Clinics
NYC Sexual Health Clinics provide STI and HIV telemedicine services via the NYC Sexual Health Clinic Hotline (347-396-7959), Monday to Friday, 9 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Select clinics see patients for emergency contraception, emergency PEP, HIV treatment initiation and other services with referral from this hotline. See updated information on hours and services.

The NYC Health Department may change recommendations as the situation evolves. 6.25.20