

# Patient Guide to PEP

## What is PEP?

HIV prophylaxis, also known as post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), is a medication that can be prescribed to patients to reduce the chances of developing HIV after potential exposure to the disease.

PEP must be started **within 72 hours (3 days)** after exposure, which can occur through sexual assault or rape, and taken **consistently** for 28 days to be effective.



## Is PEP right for you?

PEP may not be prescribed to every patient receiving a sexual assault forensic exam (SAFE). There are a number of factors your health care professional will consider before prescribing the medication. Those factors may include, but are not limited to:

- Physical trauma such as bleeding or tearing
- Site of penetration (vaginal, oral, or anal)
- Pre-existing medical conditions or pregnancy status
- Potential HIV status of the offender

Some patients do experience side effects when taking PEP. Speak with a healthcare professional or HIV Patient Navigator if you have questions about your health or experience any of the following side effects:

- Gastrointestinal side effects (nausea, vomiting, diarrhea)
- Headache
- Fatigue or Insomnia

Your health care provider may schedule a follow-up appointment within several days to evaluate your tolerance of the medication. It is important that you attend this appointment.

Do your best to not stop taking the medication without first discussing it with a health care professional.

## How effective is PEP?

PEP can be effective in preventing HIV, but it does not work 100% of the time.

The medication's effectiveness is increased when taken consistently and requires following medication directions, including taking the entire course of prescribed medication.

Be sure to follow medication instructions as accurately as possible. If you have questions or concerns, your Forensic Nurse Examiner, health care professional, or HIV Patient Navigator are available to help. If you are unsure who to contact, an advocate with your local Rape Crisis Center will help ensure you have the information you need.



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## What is the cost of PEP?

As of October 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019, the law requires that the State pay for a full course of PEP medication for survivors of rape and sexual assault that are deemed at risk for contracting HIV. You may elect to use your healthcare insurance to cover part of the medication cost, but you have the right to refuse the use of your insurance. For some patients, this will help protect privacy. You may also elect to participate in a manufacturer's financial assistance program. Some manufacturers offer the medication at little or no cost for those who qualify.

Your HIV Patient Navigator, Forensic Nurse Examiner, or health care provider are available to assist you in this process. This includes any questions you may have about the treatment, cost, and reimbursement.

Maryland is aiming to ensure that no survivor of sexual assault is denied access to PEP due to cost concerns.

## Resources

If you are a survivor seeking information on PEP or advocacy services, the following resources are available:

- To find your local Rape Crisis Center call **211** or visit MCASA's website at **mcasa.org** and navigate to Survivors Seeking Help → Find A Rape Crisis Center.
- For more information on where to get a SAFE exam and access to PEP visit MCASA's website at **mcasa.org** and navigate to Survivors Seeking Help → Getting Medical Attention.



If you are a Forensic Nurse Examiner, or medical care professional, seeking information or assistance on prescribing PEP, you can utilize the following resources:

- Contact the National Clinician's Post-Exposure Prophylaxis Hotline at **1-888-448-4911**.
  - This hotline assists with assessing risk of exposure, determining the appropriateness of prescribing PEP, selecting the best PEP regimen, and advising on follow-up testing.
  - The hotline is available for clinicians 7 days a week from 9 am – 2 am EST.
- Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at **CDC.gov** and search "HIV risk PEP" for links to consumer and provider resources.

## Your Rights

For questions about crime victim's rights and your right to PEP, when deemed medically appropriate, contact the **Sexual Assault Legal Institute at 301-565-2277**.

For questions regarding reimbursement and assistance in the process, please contact the **Maryland Coalition Against Sexual Assault at 301-328-7032**.