



FAQs on Sexual Health for Trans and Gender-Diverse Individuals

HIV PrEP

BACKGROUND

HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (HIV PrEP) is an HIV prevention method. It reduces the risk of getting HIV.

QUESTION

Is HIV PrEP effective for trans and gender-diverse (TGD) individuals?



ANSWER



Yes, there are effective HIV PrEP options for TGD individuals. While feminizing hormones may slightly reduce levels of one of the oral HIV PrEP drugs, this reduction is minimal and does not lower PrEP's high efficacy rate when taken daily.

There are several different types of HIV PrEP medications available by prescription in Canada. HIV PrEP can be taken routinely, typically either as a pill taken by mouth every day or as a regular injection from a health-care provider.

Your health-care provider can help you decide which form of HIV-PrEP is most suitable for you.

If you are prescribed HIV PrEP, it is important that you take it regularly as prescribed. If you are having trouble taking HIV PrEP as prescribed, you can talk to your pharmacist or other health-care provider for suggestions.

It is important to minimize breaks in your skin and other trauma during sex, since this increases the risk of getting HIV if you are exposed. Using plenty of lubricant during sex helps minimize trauma. If you are using testosterone and are having pain during frontal sex, you can talk to your pharmacist or other health-care provider about possible treatment options.



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QUESTION

Is HIV PrEP safe for TGD individuals?

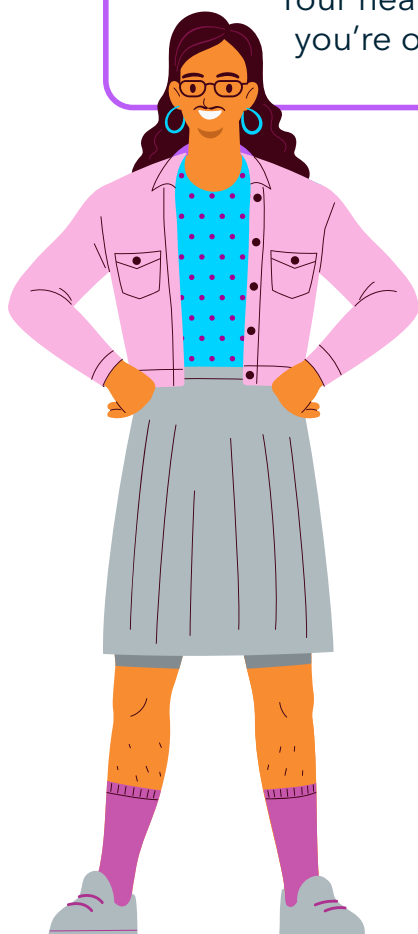
ANSWER



Yes, HIV PrEP is safe for TGD individuals. There are no risks or safety concerns (aside from the usual warnings for all populations) for this population when taking HIV PrEP.

Anyone who takes HIV PrEP has a small risk of side effects, such as nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, headache and dizziness. These are usually mild and temporary. Side effects occur in less than 10% of people taking HIV PrEP. There are also some very rare risks to kidney and bone health for those taking oral HIV PrEP.

Your health-care provider will periodically monitor your health while you're on HIV PrEP, including checking that you remain HIV-negative.



QUESTION

Does HIV PrEP interact with gender-affirming hormone therapy?

ANSWER



Other than a slight reduction in levels of one of the oral HIV PrEP drugs with feminizing hormones, which does not lower the high efficacy rate when taken daily, there are no known drug interactions between HIV PrEP and gender-affirming hormone therapy. HIV PrEP can be safely taken with hormone therapy, and it will not alter the effectiveness of hormone therapy.





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DoxyPEP

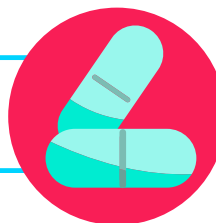
BACKGROUND

Doxycycline postexposure prophylaxis (doxyPEP) is a way of decreasing the risk of getting 3 specific sexually transmitted infections (STIs): syphilis, chlamydia and gonorrhea. DoxyPEP involves taking 1 dose of an antibiotic by mouth within 72 hours of sex without a condom; this includes oral sex without a condom, even if condoms are used for other types of sex.



QUESTION

Is doxyPEP recommended for TGD individuals?



ANSWER

Currently, doxyPEP is recommended only for cis men who have sex with men and for trans women who are at increased risk of getting an STI. People who are considered at increased risk include those who have had a previous STI or who have multiple sexual partners with whom they do not use condoms. If you are a cis man who has sex with men or a trans woman, your health-care provider will discuss your risk of getting an STI and whether doxyPEP would be helpful for you.

DoxyPEP is not routinely recommended for groups other than cis men and trans women currently. Other populations have unfortunately not been studied enough to determine that the risk of STIs is high enough for doxyPEP to be worthwhile. If you believe you are at high risk of STIs, please discuss this with your health-care provider.

QUESTION

What are the risks of doxyPEP?

ANSWER

DoxyPEP can cause side effects including stomach upset, sun sensitivity and throat inflammation. The medication can also interact with other medications and foods. If you are going to use doxyPEP, you should discuss with your pharmacist or health-care provider how to deal with or prevent side effects, as well as how to take the medication.



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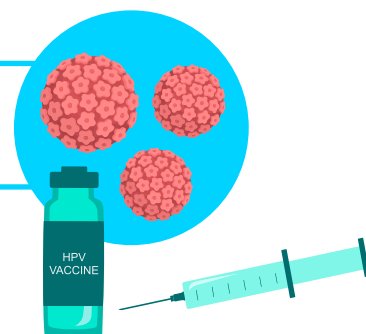
HPV Vaccine

BACKGROUND

The human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccine provides protection against the most harmful strains of HPV. HPV is responsible for most cases of cancer of the cervix, vagina, vulva, penis, anus and throat. It can also cause genital warts. HPV is spread through close skin contact, including sexual contact. Most people with HPV do not have symptoms, so they do not know that they have the infection or that they can spread it.

QUESTION

Is the HPV vaccine recommended for TGD individuals?



ANSWER

The HPV vaccine is strongly recommended for all Canadians who are 9–26 years of age, regardless of gender identity. All Canadian jurisdictions now have school-based immunization programs administered in Grades 4 to 7. Individuals who are 27 years of age or older can also receive the HPV vaccine if they are at risk of getting HPV.

Funding for the HPV vaccine outside of schools varies by province in Canada, although many provinces provide coverage up to age 27 for individuals of any gender. Private drug plans may also cover it. Even if the vaccine is not covered, you can pay for it out of pocket. Speak to a health-care provider to discuss getting vaccinated.



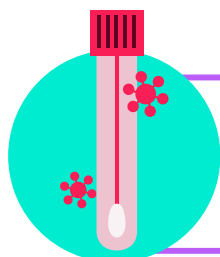


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Cervical Cancer Screening Recommendations

BACKGROUND

The implementation of routine checks, or screening, for cervical cancer has significantly decreased deaths from cervical cancer. Currently, cervical cancer checks are done using either a Pap smear or HPV testing. To collect a sample for either test, a health-care provider inserts a tube-like device called a speculum into the front hole and swabs the cervix, which is the anatomical area between the end of the vagina and the uterus.



QUESTION

Should individuals with a cervix taking testosterone-based therapy get a cervical cancer screening?

ANSWER



Yes, anyone with a cervix who has ever been sexually active and who is between 25 and 69 years of age is recommended to have either a Pap smear every 3 years or HPV testing every 5 years to check for cervical cancer, including if they are taking testosterone and if they received the HPV vaccine. If a test comes back abnormal, more frequent Pap smears/HPV testing or other testing/referrals may be required. These recommendations apply only to individuals who are or have been sexually active, including any digital or oral sexual activity with a partner.



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QUESTION

How can I make cervical cancer screening more comfortable?

ANSWER

It may be helpful to book an appointment to discuss the test with your primary health-care provider beforehand.

They can help you develop a plan to make the speculum exam as comfortable as possible, including relaxation techniques, distractions such as music or bringing a support person to the appointment. If you are using testosterone, your health-care provider may prescribe a low-dose estrogen cream to be used on the frontal area for several weeks before the exam. This will not be absorbed into the body in any meaningful amount, nor will it interfere with testosterone therapy. The use of estrogen cream can decrease physical discomfort from a speculum exam. Some provinces have started issuing self-screening kits for use at home; check with your health-care provider if this is an option in your area.



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