Overview

This fact sheet will focus on pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), the concept of HIV-negative individuals taking HIV antiretroviral medication to prevent the acquisition of HIV. In order to effectively raise the bars for prevention within the HIV care continuum, health departments, medical providers, and the community need to fully understand what PrEP is and what it is not. This video provides a short visually informative explanation of PrEP. NASTAD's Policy Statement on PrEP and related Issues for Consideration document are tools for supporting health departments in educating the community and strategically integrating PrEP into existing prevention efforts. For additional resources, watch What is PrEP? and the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention website on PrEP.

PrEP

PrEP, or pre-exposure prophylaxis, is the concept of HIV-negative individuals taking HIV antiretroviral (ARV) medication to prevent the acquisition of HIV. The use of an ARV for PrEP was approved by the United States Food and Drug Administration (FDA) in July 2012 and has been shown to be safe and effective through the Global iPrEx and Partners PrEP studies. The approved FDA label and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines specify the use of PrEP among HIV uninfected individuals at substantial risk of HIV infection. This new intervention should be targeted to specific populations: gay and bisexual men; other men who sex with men (MSM); transgender women; partners in serodiscordant couples; heterosexual individuals who are documented to be at an elevated risk of acquiring HIV through sexual activity; and/or in people who inject drugs.

The concept of using medication to prevent transmission of disease is not new. It is also not unique to HIV as medications have successfully been used to prevent malaria, some cancers (e.g., breast cancer), and even the flu. The use of ARVs for HIV prevention has also been used for decades to prevent mother-to-child transmissions, as post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), and more recently as treatment as prevention (TasP), or the use of ARV medications to suppress the viral load in an HIV positive individual thereby decreasing the likelihood of transmission.

Currently, there is only one ARV medication, Truvada, manufactured by Gilead Sciences, approved for the use of PrEP. There are multiple global demonstration studies examining the use of other ARV agents for use as PrEP (e.g., Selzentry or Maraviroc) as well as new longer acting agents and other possible dosing patterns (e.g., every other day, or event based). Studies are also examining the impact of utilizing PrEP in other specific populations. Results from these studies will be forthcoming over the next few years.

The key to successful use of PrEP is daily adherence. An efficacy of 92% protection from possible infection is possible with strict daily adherence. Regularly scheduled HIV tests and open dialogue with a medical provider are crucial. The use of PrEP does not eliminate the need to use condoms, as they are the only effective means of preventing other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) (e.g., syphilis, gonorrhea, chlamydia, etc.).

Currently there is no federal funding available to support the provision of Truvada for PrEP. CDC does, however, provide funding for PrEP related educational programs and materials as part of PS12-1201: Comprehensive Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) Prevention Programs for Health Departments. Gilead Sciences has a prescription assistance program (PAP), detailed in this fact sheet, to assist individuals who are uninsured or underinsured in being able to obtain the medication for free.