

# Medication Deferral for PrEP/PEP for HIV Prevention

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### What is a medication deferral?

A medication deferral is the period of time a person must wait to donate blood because they are taking certain medications. This waiting period is needed to protect either the health of the donor or the patient receiving the donated blood. The **Medication Deferral List** has information about the medications that impact a person's ability to donate blood. The list includes blood thinners and other commonly used medications to treat concerns such as acne, prostate symptoms, and arthritis.

### What is pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) for HIV prevention?

**Pre-exposure prophylaxis medications** (also called PrEP) are drugs that are highly effective in preventing HIV infection in people who may be exposed to HIV in the future. The Food and Drug Administration has approved three medications that can be used by people who are HIV-negative:

- Emtricitabine and tenofovir ( **Truvada** ) (oral tablet taken daily)
- Emtricitabine and tenofovir ( **Descovy** ) (oral tablet taken daily)
- Cabotegravir ( **Apretude** ) (injection every two months)

**Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP)** is the use of HIV prevention medications **after** an exposure to HIV. This could be an unexpected exposure at work for health care and emergency caregivers or an unexpected exposure through sexual contact.

The CDC website describes how **PrEP** and **PEP** can prevent HIV infection. This highly effective viral suppression can make it more difficult to detect HIV in an infected donor – there is a potential for false negative HIV test results in an infected donor taking PrEP/PEP medications.

### How do PrEP/PEP medications affect donor testing for HIV?

PrEP and PEP make it difficult for HIV to multiply after the person is exposed - this is called viral suppression. You may have heard the public health message “**Undetectable=Untransmittable**,” also called U=U for sexual contact. When a viral load is “undetectable,” it means the level of virus is so low that it cannot be detected by an HIV test. In the case of blood donation, it means that a donor test for HIV may not detect the virus at these low levels.

## If you must be HIV negative to use PrEP/PEP for HIV prevention, why is a medication deferral necessary?

PrEP/PEP medications are **highly effective** at preventing HIV transmission when used as prescribed. However, the medications are not 100% effective, and it is possible to become infected with HIV while taking them. If PrEP/PEP is not used as prescribed, there is a greater chance for becoming infected with HIV. This is called a “breakthrough” HIV infection.

There is another important point to understand: In a donor with a breakthrough infection, PrEP/PEP medications may cause the level of HIV in the blood to drop to a level that cannot be detected when a donor is tested for HIV. That means an infected person taking PrEP/PEP medications could unknowingly transmit HIV to a patient who receives the blood transfusion.

## Does the public health message “Undetectable = Untransmittable” apply to blood donation?

“**Undetectable = Untransmittable**” (U=U) means that people with HIV who have an undetectable amount of HIV in the bloodstream cannot transmit HIV to others during sexual contact. This important public health message can be confusing for potential blood donors. While U=U is accurate for transmission of HIV during sexual contact, this does not apply to the risk for HIV transmission when a patient receives a large volume of donated blood. **Anyone who has ever had a positive test for HIV is not eligible to donate blood, even if their viral load is undetectable.**

## What is the length of deferral for PrEP/PEP medications?

The ability of HIV prevention medications to create an undetectable level of virus continues after the last dose. A person using oral PrEP/PEP medications is deferred for three months after the last dose. A person using injectable PrEP is deferred for two years after the last injection.

## Why are people using injectable PrEP deferred for longer than those taking oral PrEP/PEP medications?

Injectable PrEP can suppress the virus to undetectable levels for a much longer period of time than oral PrEP/PEP medications.

## Does this medication deferral only apply to men who have sex with men?

No, the deferral applies to everyone, and here's why:

- The medication deferral is not related to a donor's gender or sexual identity.

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- The medication deferral is not related to risk associated with sexual activity.

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- PrEP/PEP medications can be used by anyone for the prevention of HIV infection.

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- The medication deferral applies to ALL people who have taken PrEP/PEP to reduce their risk of HIV.

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- The only reason for the medication deferral is the medication's ability to decrease the level of HIV to the point that it cannot be detected when a donor is tested for HIV.

## I am currently taking a medication. Should I stop taking PrEP to donate blood?

AABB strongly recommends that people consult with their health care providers about decisions related to taking PrEP or any other medication that might result in deferral. AABB fully supports the **CDC's Ending the HIV Epidemic in the U.S. campaign**, including increased access to and use of PrEP medications. AABB would not support a decision to donate that does not also consider the health of the donor. Individuals who are not eligible to donate blood can still support a strong blood supply by sharing about the importance of blood donation with friends and family or hosting a blood drive.