Who can I talk to about PEP?
Deciding to take PEP may raise personal issues for some people. This is understandable. It is important that you seek support and discuss these issues if you feel this will help. If you wish to seek professional support, please make an appointment with one of our counsellors.

NSW PEP hotline:
1800 PEP NOW (1800 737 669) 24 hours/7 days.

LIVERPOOL Immunology & HIV Medicine:
(02) 9827 8002

LIVERPOOL Sexual Health Service:
(02) 9827 8022

LIVERPOOL Hospital Emergency:
(02) 9828 3000

CAMPBELLTOWN Sexual Health Service:
(02) 4628 5878

SEXUAL ASSAULT SERVICE:
Bankstown (02) 9780 2777
Liverpool (02) 9828 4844
Campbelltown (02) 4633 4100

NSW Sexual Health infoline:

STI Information for Gay Men:
www.thedramadownunder.info

ACON (formerly AIDS Council of NSW):
(02) 9206 2000 or www.acon.org.au

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www.ashm.org.au

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What is PEP?
PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis) is a four-week course of anti-HIV (antiretroviral) drugs which may stop HIV infection becoming established soon after an exposure to the virus.

What does being exposed mean?
If you come into contact with infected body fluids (like blood or semen) through sexual activity, sharing needles etc, you may have been exposed to, and at risk of acquiring HIV.

Will PEP work for me?
Taking PEP is no guarantee that you will not develop HIV as a result of a recent exposure. Likewise, if you do not take PEP there is no certainty that you will become infected.

PEP may prevent HIV infection, particularly if started as soon as possible after exposure and is continued for the full course of four weeks, however the evidence for its use is limited.

There is research that shows healthcare workers taking PEP after a needlestick injury from an HIV-infected patient had an 80% lower risk of contracting HIV compared with healthcare workers who didn’t take PEP. Babies who are given anti-HIV drugs soon after birth when they are born to HIV-infected mothers also have a reduced risk of acquiring HIV.

When do I start PEP?
As soon as possible. For PEP to be effective, you need to commence treatment as quickly as you can after a possible exposure to HIV. Taking PEP more than 3 days (72 hours) after an exposure means it is not likely to work.

Do I need to complete the course?
Yes. Research has highlighted the importance of taking the right dose for the right length of time.

Try not to miss a dose but if you do forget, it is often better to take it a bit late rather than not at all. Check with your doctor but do not double your next dose.

Do I need to see a doctor or nurse during/after completing the course?
Yes. Follow-up is essential. Your clinician may suggest that you see them again at regular intervals. Screening for gonorrhoea and chlamydia is recommended two weeks following sexual exposures. An HIV test is required six months following the exposure. If you develop symptoms which may suggest you have contracted HIV (most commonly fever, night sweats and rashes) during your PEP course, you must seek medical care immediately.

How much does PEP cost?
There is a small pharmacy dispensing fee for PEP drugs. This cost is reduced further for people who have a health care card.

What about other drugs?
PEP can affect the way other drugs work and in some cases the interaction with other drugs can be dangerous or even lethal. Please discuss with your doctor any other prescription or recreational drugs you may be taking or planning to take.

Do I need to practice safe sex and safe injecting while I am on PEP?
Yes. There is no evidence to suggest that PEP will protect you from HIV if you have another exposure to HIV while you are on the drugs. Since you are at risk of HIV, you need to avoid potentially exposing your sexual and/or needle-sharing partners to HIV until the result of your six-month test is available.

What do I do to take PEP?
You will need to discuss PEP with a doctor. Not all doctors can prescribe PEP. It can be prescribed by hospital emergency departments, sexual health clinics and doctors who specialise in HIV.

Your doctor will decide which drugs you should be taking. This choice can differ from person to person and may also depend upon the exposure risk. Most doctors will prescribe between two and three drugs.

Initially, you may be provided with a PEP starter kit so you can begin treatment immediately. The rest of the prescription can be filled by visiting the outpatient pharmacy.

What does taking PEP involve?
PEP involves a 4 week course of drugs. You will need to take the drugs exactly as prescribed. Medical research has shown that anti-HIV drugs require strong adherence in order to be effective. It is important that you take them at that same time each day as well as in the same way, e.g.—with meals. This may mean making some adjustments to your lifestyle.

Will I experience side effects?
Some people experience no side effects at all, however some will experience mild to moderate side effects. Side effects are usually more severe in the first week and reduce over time.

Ask your doctor to explain potential side effects and carefully read the information that accompanies the drugs.

You and your doctor will closely monitor any side effects. If anything happens that causes concern or if you feel you can’t tolerate the side effects, contact your doctor or hospital emergency department. Your PEP medication may have to be modified.