

PrEP 'extremely effective' at reducing risk of HIV, study finds

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Credit: Miguel Á. Padriñán from Pexels

A drug which reduces the risk of HIV is "extremely effective," a new study has affirmed as experts called for the drug to be used more widely.

The study, which helped inform the widespread use of the HIV pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) in England, found that the drug can significantly reduce a person's odds of developing HIV.

Academics led by U.K. Health Security Agency (UKHSA) and Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, examined data on more than 24,000 people aged 16 and over who attended 157 sexual health services in England between 2017 and 2020.

The study, published in *The Lancet HIV*, saw [experts](#) track people's PrEP need, uptake and use, and whether or not they were diagnosed with HIV or a sexually transmitted infection (STI).

Experts concluded that taking PrEP can reduce a person's chances of being diagnosed with HIV by 86%.

But the authors caution that "urgent work is required to ensure equity of access for all who might benefit."

Dr. John Saunders, from the UKHSA, said, "This trial has further demonstrated the effectiveness of PrEP in preventing HIV transmission and has, for the first time, shown the protective effect reported by earlier trials, but at scale and delivered through routine sexual health services in England.

"Now we know just how effective PrEP is in real-world settings, substantially reducing the chance of acquiring HIV."

NHS England's national director for specialized commissioning, John Stewart, added, "Not only did the trial directly prevent many cases of HIV, help normalize the use of PrEP, remove stigma and pave the way for a routinely commissioned clinically and cost effective PrEP service, but it also made a very real contribution towards our goal of ending new

cases of HIV by 2030."

The government's chief adviser on HIV, Professor Kevin Fenton, said, "Advances in medicines in treating HIV have been life-changing for so many people and PrEP has been central to that.

"It is a powerful tool that reduces the risk of acquiring HIV. Expanding access to, and the uptake of PReP is key to our ambition to end HIV transmission in England by 2030, and a public health priority.

"PrEP can help protect you even if you don't have HIV—and is available for free from sexual health services."

It comes after officials announced that "opt-out" HIV testing in A&E departments is to be ramped up in a bid to find undiagnosed cases of the virus.

After a successful pilot project, [health officials](#) are increasing testing of blood samples in areas where there is higher prevalence of HIV in a bid to spot people with the condition.

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