



Air Force Eases Restrictions for Pilots and Air Crew on PrEP to Prevent HIV

Previously, pilots and air crew were grounded for 30 days after starting PrEP in case they had side effects. Now, they wait 14 days.

September 14, 2023 By Laura Schmidt

In a win for HIV prevention and an Air Force LGBTQ group, the Department of the Air Force recently announced that it will ease flight restrictions for pilots and air crew taking pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) for HIV prevention, according to an [Air Force Medical Service \(AFMS\) news release](#).

Under previous guidelines, pilots and air crew starting [PrEP](#) were grounded for 30 days in case they experienced side effects acclimating to the medications, reports [Air Force Times](#). That wait period has now been shaved down to 14 days.

In addition, members who take PrEP are no longer required to get a waiver. The waiver had been required, the newspaper reports, in order to help health care providers track safety data among the users, but since PrEP is now considered safe, the waivers are no longer needed.

The Food and Drug Administration approved the first PrEP medication—the daily pill Truvada—in July 2012. The Air Force first approved the use of PrEP for [pilot and air crew members in 2019](#). The FDA has approved two additional forms of PrEP: Descovy, an updated form of Truvada, and Apretude, a long-acting injectable. For more details, check out this [HIV Prevention Drug Chart](#).

The Air Force updated its PrEP guidelines in response to [pilots who spoke publicly](#) about the professional harm caused by restricting the medication.

“We have always been in alignment with [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] guidelines for PrEP, but by reducing the time on duty restriction, this change will enhance readiness and help retain servicemembers,” said Colonel Rich Kipp, chief of the medical standards division, in the [news release](#). “Members of the working group determined the waiver was not necessary, given Air

Force review of safety data over the last five years demonstrated it was safe to reduce the duty restriction time.”

Between 2017 and 2022, about 1,600 troops were newly diagnosed with HIV, according to a nonpartisan [Congressional Research Service \(CRS\) report](#). Another health study found that 22% of active duty troops and 18% of those in the reserve components in 2018 were at high risk for HIV, an [Air Force Times article](#) stated.

The policy update is partly thanks to the LGBTQ+ Initiative Team, one of the Department of the Air Force’s [Barrier Analysis Working Groups created in 2021](#), who identified the previous policy as a barrier to service. The Air Force hopes that the new policy will retain existing LGBTQ service members and encourage others to join.

“Enhancing HIV prevention efforts and reducing barriers to accessing PrEP could be [an] effective means of achieving national goals and protecting the health and wellbeing of the force,” the CRS report said.

In related news, [the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force gave PrEP an A grade](#), which means that under the Affordable Care Act, health insurers must cover the regimen.

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