



Air Force PrEP Restrictions

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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 medication, 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 obtain 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 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 service members,” 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 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, which identified the previous policy as a barrier to service.
