Colorado Pharmacists Can Now Prescribe PrEP and PEP to Prevent HIV

In a state where HIV rates have been climbing, faster and better access to prevention is vital.

November 24, 2020 By Trent Straube

Thanks to a law that went into effect this month, pharmacists in Colorado can prescribe pre- and post-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP and PEP) to prevent HIV, reports The Colorado Sun.

The goal is to allow HIV-negative people faster and better access to these prevention methods, especially at a time when HIV rates have been rising in the state. New diagnoses jumped 12.4% between 2018 and 2019, to more than 450 cases (rates this year seem to be lower, but it's difficult to parse the data due to the COVID-19 pandemic).

A health survey by the state LGBTQ advocacy group Colorado One found that 42% of respondents were concerned that their health care providers weren't supportive of LGBTQ people. Given that viewpoint, advocates worry that people at risk for HIV wouldn't feel comfortable seeking PrEP or PEP.

It's also hoped that the new law will lower stigma associated with seeking HIV prevention or talking with a doctor about sex.

What's more, the newspaper reports, many Coloradans live in rural areas where they might not be able to visit a health care provider but can get to their local pharmacist relatively quickly.

As Emily Zadvorny, PharmD, explains to Denver7 News in the video above, time is of the essence when prescribing PEP, a regimen consisting of tablets taken daily for about a month that is meant for a person who might have been exposed to HIV. It's highly effective, but it must be started within 72 hours of the possible exposure—the earlier the better.

PrEP, on the other hand, is a daily prevention tablet for people who are at risk of possible exposure. Currently, two forms of PrEP have been approved in the United States: Truvada and Descovy; a generic version of Truvada recently became available.

To learn more about these prevention methods, see the POZ Basics on Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) and Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP).

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