HIV Prevention PrEP to Be Readily Available in England (Finally)

The country's National Health Service will pay for the drug as part of its goal to end HIV transmission by 2030.

March 18, 2020 By Trent Straube

Starting in April, people in England at risk for HIV will be able to take PrEP, or pre-exposure prophylaxis, a daily prevention tablet, reports BBC.com. The country's National Health Service (NHS) will pay for the drug.

PrEP is already available in Scotland and Wales, but the NHS has until now refused to provide the med in England, stating that it is responsible for treatment not prevention. PrEP has been available there only through a limited three-year trial that has over 20,000 participants.

According to the Department of Health and Social Care, the government will distribute £16 million (about $19.3 million) to local authorities. The funding will include efforts to supply PrEP to the trial participants who wish to continue the med. Supplying PrEP to those at risk is part of the government's goal of ending new HIV transmissions by 2030.

As POZ reported in January, the United Kingdom reported a 71% drop in HIV cases among gay and bisexual men since 2012. (The United Kingdom consists of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.) Part of that stunning decrease was attributed to PrEP; another important contributor was U=U, or undetectable equals untransmittable, the fact that HIV-positive people who take meds and maintain an undetectable viral load can't transmit HIV via sex, even when condoms are ditched.

It's estimated that about 103,800 people were living with HIV in the United Kingdom as of 2018, with nearly 7,500 unaware of their status.

In the United States, PrEP is available as Truvada and Descovy tablets; both consist of two meds, and both are manufactured by Gilead Sciences. For more details, see "What's the Difference Between Truvada and Descovy for PrEP?"

The BBC and Gov.UK articles did not mention which med would be provided as PrEP, but in 2018, a high court in Britain overturned the patent extension on Truvada; it was reported that generic versions could cost nearly 90% less.

PrEP is estimated to be about 99% effective among men who have sex with men and greater than the current 88% to 90% estimate for heterosexual men and women. For more details, see “How Well Do U=U and PrEP Work? The CDC Updates Its Answers.”

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