

Illinois Pharmacists Can Now Prescribe HIV Prevention Meds

A new law allows people to get PrEP and PEP from pharmacists without first seeing a doctor. Another boosts Black-led HIV resources.

June 15, 2022 By [Trent Straube](#)

More folks in Illinois can access HIV prevention and care thanks to two bills signed into law by Governor JB Pritzker. One allows people at risk of acquiring [HIV](#) to access pre- and post-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP and PEP) from a pharmacist without a referral from a doctor. A second ensures that the African American HIV/AIDS Resource Fund makes biomedical preventions, like [PrEP](#) and [PEP](#), more accessible to the community.

Both laws will help address the state's racial and ethnic disparities in the HIV epidemic. In Illinois, 46% of people living with HIV are Black, according to federal data in a [press release from the governor](#). However, only 8% of PrEP prescriptions are written for [African Americans](#).

PrEP refers to daily pills or long-lasting injectables that are highly effective at preventing HIV. People who are at risk of being exposed to HIV can take PrEP. In contrast, PEP, a prescription of daily HIV meds usually taken for about a month, is prescribed after a potential exposure. PEP must be started no later than 72 hours after the exposure, and the sooner the better.

"If we want to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic in our state by 2030, then we have to make preventative care like PrEP and PEP accessible to all Illinoisans," Governor Pritzker said in the press release. "These medications are incredibly effective at preventing infection and transmission, and they are essential to our mission of Getting to Zero. My administration knows that these efforts must be equity-centered and proactive to have the biggest impact. That's why we are investing in Black communities that are disproportionately affected by HIV/AIDS. I am proud to sign these bills that bring us one step closer to our ultimate goal: zero new HIV transmissions."

Bill HB 4430 not only allows pharmacists to prescribe HIV prevention meds but also requires that health insurers cover the related testing and care at the same rate as when they're provided by a doctor. In addition, the law ensures that pharmacists receive support and training so that they can refer patients to HIV care.

Because many people don't have a primary care provider or are hesitant to seek HIV-related care from their doctors, the bill is expected to increase access to HIV care.

“You typically have to go to an HIV clinic in order to get HIV prevention drugs,” Timothy Jackson, director of government relations at AIDS Foundation of Chicago, [told NPR Illinois](#). “And so what HB 4430 does is it increases access to PrEP and PEP and allows people to go to their neighborhood Walgreens or CVS or Walmart—wherever they get their prescription drugs—to get those [HIV prevention] drugs, and no one is ever the wiser.”

The other bill, HB 5549, requires that for every \$3 million available to the African American HIV/AIDS Resource Fund, the group must create and maintain at least one Black-led Center of Excellence HIV Biomedical Resource Hub.

“Historically, Black people living with HIV or AIDS have not received the care and resources they deserve. Amending the historic African American HIV AIDS Response Act to extend it another 25 years and to fund Black-led health hubs are significant steps in the right direction,” said State Representative Lamont J. Robinson (D-Chicago), the lead House sponsor for HB 5549, in the press release. “By establishing more Black-led HIV resource hubs, we’re guaranteeing Black Illinoisans have the health resources they need while also working to reduce the disparities in HIV treatment between Black and non-Black residents.”

To learn more about PrEP and PEP and other prevention methods, see the [POZ Basics on HIV Prevention](#).

In related Illinois news, last summer the state became the second one, after California, to decriminalize HIV. For more, read “[UPDATE: Illinois Governor Signs Bill to Repeal HIV Crime Laws.](#)”