People Without Insurance Can Get Free PrEP

The U.S. Health Department launched “Ready, Set, PrEP” to provide the HIV prevention med at no cost.

December 3, 2019 By Trent Straube

This article has been updated to include the cost of the meds.

Thanks to a national program called “Ready, Set, PrEP,” people who don’t have insurance for prescription drugs can now get free pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), the daily pill to prevent contracting HIV. However, the cost of related clinic visits and lab work may vary depending on the person’s income.

CVS Health, Walgreens and Rite Aid are participating in the federal program. This means that by March 30, 2020, PrEP medication can be picked up at their more than 21,000 pharmacies.

> Today we’re announcing the launch of ’Ready, Set, PrEP,’ a national program that makes PrEP medications available at no cost to uninsured Americans at risk for #HIV. This is a major step forward in @POTUS’s plan to end the HIV epidemic in America: https://t.co/d88gjr8ZH0 pic.twitter.com/LOiQ7dNYG9
>
> — Secretary Alex Azar (@SecAzar) December 3, 2019

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) launched the program December 3, according to an HHS press release. The program is part of the federal initiative “Ending the HIV Epidemic: A Plan for America” that aims to lower HIV rates nationwide by 75% in five years and by

90% in 10 years. One way to reach that goal is by increasing access to PrEP.

To qualify for “Ready, Set, PrEP,” people must meet three criteria:

- Be HIV negative
- Have a prescription for PrEP
- Not have prescription drug coverage.

Visit GetYourPrEP.com or call the toll-free number 855-447-8410 to see whether you qualify.

The two meds currently approved for use as PrEP are Truvada and an updated version called Descovy. Both are manufactured by Gilead Sciences.

For its “Ready, Set, PrEP” program, the federal government will pay Gilead $200 per bottle of Truvada (one bottle contains 30 tablets and lasts one month). According to The New York Times, this plan will be in effect until March 30, when the pharmacies’ donated services will have kicked in and the government will have established cheaper ways to get the meds to people. A Gilead spokesperson told the Times that it makes not money from the distribution setup.

James Krellenstein, of advocacy group Prep4All Collaboration, criticized the arrangement, noting that the government could be paying for the lab and clinic costs instead of the meds. Others pointed out that Truvada is available for much less than $200 in other countries. PrEP4All has noted before that it costs less than $6 internationally.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) notes that more than 1 million people at risk for HIV are good candidates for PrEP, though only a small proportion take advantage of the prevention med.

Perhaps, as POZ previously reported, this is because people seeking PrEP face numerous nonfinancial roadblocks. For a collection of PrEP-related articles in POZ, click #PrEP or start with PrEP: The Basics.

And to learn more about the federal HIV initiative, read “Plans to End the HIV Epidemic at Home and Abroad.”

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