



Double Hey is Double Happiness

HIV Treatment and Prevention

The past few years have brought some of the most exciting developments in HIV prevention we have ever seen. Previously, people relied almost exclusively on condoms for HIV prevention. Now, two ideas have emerged that have the potential to drastically reduce—or even eliminate—new cases of HIV. These ideas are known as treatment as prevention (TasP) and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).



TasP (Treatment as Prevention)

TasP is the idea that when HIV-positive people take their medication every day they can manage their HIV to the point that it can't be passed on, even when condoms are not used. A person whose HIV is well-managed is said to be undetectable, meaning HIV can't be detected in their bloodstream. Beyond its ability to prevent HIV, treatment improves the health and wellbeing of HIV-positive people, helping them to live a longer, healthier life.

TasP is proving to be one of the most effective ways to prevent HIV. Several studies around the world have looked at whether a low or undetectable viral load – the sign of effective treatment – reduces the chance of transmitting HIV.⁽¹⁾ Looking at serodiscordant couples (or couples where one partner is HIV-positive and the other is HIV-negative) over the course of several years, there was not a single case of HIV being passed on from the positive undetectable partner to the negative partner.⁽²⁾

Other studies have shown that the sooner people are diagnosed with HIV, and the sooner they are able to get on treatment, the more likely that treatment will be effective and successful.⁽³⁾ While for many years treatment was viewed as a sign of illness and a reminder of the stigma attached to HIV, now it should be a symbol of empowerment, health, and wellbeing.



PrEP (Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis)

PrEP is the idea that HIV-negative people can take a pill to almost completely eliminate their chance of getting HIV. When taken daily, PrEP is more effective than condoms at preventing HIV. Where condoms are considered only 70% effective when used consistently,⁽⁴⁾ PrEP is up to 99% effective.^{(5),(6)}

PrEP is unique because it can prevent HIV in almost every circumstance. PrEP prevents HIV even if condoms aren't used. It recognises that even the most diligent people may find it difficult to wear a condom every time they have sex. PrEP also prevents HIV even when sex partners aren't sure of their status, or mistakenly think they're negative. PrEP can also protect the negative partner in a serodiscordant couple where the positive partner isn't able to reach undetectable status.

It's important to remember PrEP does not protect against STIs other than HIV. However, PrEP has the added benefit of encouraging more frequent testing for these STIs, like syphilis, gonorrhoea, and chlamydia. Because PrEP users must visit their doctor every three months to renew their prescription, their doctor will also conduct a full STI screen, meaning STIs are more likely to be detected and treated earlier. This helps not only the person on PrEP, but everybody in their community.



TasP + PrEP Together = Double Happiness

There has always been a shared responsibility in having safer sex, regardless of a person's HIV status. Unfortunately it has not always worked this way in the real world. Misinformation and misunderstanding has resulted in significant stigma and fear around HIV, and created significant barriers for people to talk about it. This fear and discomfort can discourage people from getting tested, knowing their status, or even get on treatment if they're positive.

Together, TasP and PrEP have the potential to change these attitudes. The remarkable effectiveness of these prevention tools can remove the fear and anxiety surrounding sex and HIV: fear of transmission, fear of sickness, or fear of rejection. When stigma and fear are no longer part of the equation, negative and positive people become equal partners in taking control of their sexual health, improving their wellbeing, and working toward ending HIV.

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