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What is PEP?

Post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is a short-term anti-retroviral (ARV) treatment that reduces the likelihood of HIV infection after exposure to HIV-infected blood or sexual contact with an HIV-positive person. The drug regimen for PEP consists of a combination of ARV mediations that are taken a period of four weeks.

Administration of PEP.

Where infection occurs as a result of exposure, ARV treatment should begin before the infected cells settle in the lymph nodes. Lymph nodes are organs that contains white blood cells, and they are important in the proper functioning of the immune system.

There is no medical agreement on the time limit for administering PEP. Some healthcare workers suggest beginning PEP 24-36 hours after possible exposure to HIV through rape or unprotected sex, other international guidelines suggest 24-48 hours. South African policy
advises that PEP should be administered within 72 hours after the potential exposure to HIV.

Conditions of effective treatment.

In order to make sure that PEP treatment is effective and to prevent HIV infection after a rape incident, the survivor should:

- start PEP treatment as soon as possible, but no later than 72 hours after the rape or sexual assault;
- take every dose of the medication as prescribed for 28 days;
- be tested and treated for other sexually transmitted infections (STIs);
- be tested for pregnancy; and if reported early morning after pill to prevent chances of getting pregnant should be given.
- practice safe sex for at least six month after the rape incident;
- return to the health facility for follow-up tests and counselling at six weeks, three months, six months, and one year after the rape incident

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