

Combivir™ Information Sheet

What is PEP?

PEP is medication that may help to prevent HIV infection after sexual or injection drug exposures. It stands for Post-Exposure Prophylaxis. “Post-Exposure” means after a possible exposure to HIV and “prophylaxis” means medicines that prevent infection.

How do I get PEP medication?

If PEP is appropriate for you your blood will be drawn to check your current HIV status. You will then be given a 5-8 day supply of PEP medication. At your follow-up visit in 3-5 days a medical provider will review your HIV test results with you and, when appropriate, give you the remaining dose of your PEP medication.

Which PEP medication will I be taking and how do I take my medication?

The PEP medication you will be taking is called Combivir. Combivir is a combination pill containing two medicines, AZT and 3TC. You will take 2 pills every day for a total of 28 days. It is best to take one pill in the morning and one pill in the early evening. Combivir may be taken with or without food, but probably causes less upset stomach if it is taken with food. Be sure to drink plenty of fluids with the pills.

Why is it important to take my medications correctly?

The medication must be in the blood stream for it to work to prevent HIV infection. Also, if the medication does not work to prevent HIV infection, drug resistance might develop if the medication is not taken correctly. Drug resistance means that HIV is able to overcome a drug that was at one time was working well to keep it from spreading. HIV can develop resistance to PEP medications when they are used at doses lower than the recommended dose, or when doses are skipped! That’s why it is especially important to take these medications correctly.

What are the possible side effects of Combivir?

The most common side effects are fatigue or tiredness, nausea and headache. About half of people who take this medicine might have one or more of these symptoms for a few days. They usually go away on their own. It’s often hard to know if these symptoms are caused by the medicine or by being upset and worried, which is normal, of course. We can help you treat these symptoms if they are bothering you. Other unusual side effects may include blood test abnormalities of the red blood cells (anemia, can make you feel weak or out of breath), the white blood cells (that fight infections), or the liver. It would be very rare for these to happen with just 28 days of medication, and if they do, they will almost always get better once the medicine is stopped.

Does Combivir interact with other drugs?

It does not interact with any common medications.

What should I do if I have problems with the medications or questions?

With the start of PEP, there may be temporary side effects such as headache, fatigue or a general sense of feeling ill. These side effects are likely to get better or even disappear over time. If side effects are severe, report immediately to the emergency department. If side effects are not severe but they are bothering you, please call 437-3000 and ask to speak with a medical provider.

For general information, call the California AIDS Hotline at 1-800-367-2437.