TuSalud

Illinois Pharmacy Act and PrEP4IL Expand Access to HIV Prevention

A standing order from the Illinois Department of Public Health will make it easier to obtain PrEP and PEP to prevent HIV.

May 22, 2025 By Laura Schmidt

The Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH) issued a standing order that builds upon a 2022 law allowing pharmacists to dispense and administer HIV prevention medications without a referral from a doctor, according to an IDPH news release.

Signed into law by Illinois Governor JB Pritzker, the Illinois Pharmacy Act authorizes pharmacists to provide pre- and post-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP and PEP) to prevent HIV if there is a standing order approved by a physician or by IDPH director Sameer Vohra, MD, JD. The law also requires that health insurers cover the related testing and care at the same rate as when they're provided by a doctor.

Interested pharmacists must undergo training, including guidance on providing services in a private and confidential environment, ordering and interpreting tests and maintaining records.

The latest standing order will streamline the reimbursement process for pharmacists who provide PrEP services and make it easier for people at risk for HIV to obtain PrEP and PEP.

"This standing order now takes our efforts even further, opening additional doors of access so more individuals and communities can have the opportunity to take this preventive treatment and dramatically reduce their risk of acquiring HIV," Vohra said in the release.

PrEP refers to daily pills or long-lasting injectables that are highly effective at preventing HIV. People at risk of exposure 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 within 72 hours after the exposure.

“PrEP saves lives, and removing the prescription barrier means more people—especially in the LGBTQ+ community—will be provided with lifesaving care,” said Mike Simmons (D–Chicago), who helped pass the bill into law, in a news release. “This is a major step forward in health equity in Illinois,” added Simmons, the state’s first openly gay senator.

What’s more, some state residents can utilize PrEP4IL, a medication assistance program through IDPH for HIV-negative people who are at risk for HIV and have a prescription for PrEP from a medical provider.

“IDPH continues to value the leadership of Governor JB Pritzker and our tremendous partnerships across Illinois all striving to help our state get to zero,” Vohra said “IDPH is very proud of our PrEP4IL program and the impact it is making to reduce HIV rates.”

Last year, there were more than 900 new applications for the PrEP4IL program, with significant growth among Black and Latino individuals, according to IDPH.

While HIV remains a concern in the state, new diagnoses are declining under Pritzker’s Getting to Zero Illinois program, which aims to have zero new HIV transmissions in the state by 2030.

In 2024, there were 1,386 new HIV diagnoses in Illinois, down 9% from the previous year, according to IDPH. However, HIV disproportionately impacts Black and Latino people, who account for more than 60% of new diagnoses in the state annually.

“No one should face unnecessary hurdles to access lifesaving medication,” Simmons said. “By expanding access to PrEP without a prescription, Illinois is not just following the science—we’re affirming the dignity and health of LGBTQ+ individuals and setting a national example of what inclusive people-first policy looks like.”

For information on the Illinois PrEP Assistance Program, call IDPH’s HIV Section PrEP Helpline at 833-773-7445 (833-PREP4IL), email DPH.PrEP4IL@illinois.gov or visit PrEPforIllinois.com.

To read more, click #Illinois. For more on #PrEP, go to POZ’s Health Basics on the prevention medication. It reads in part:

> PrEP Options

To date, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has approved three forms of PrEP: Truvada and Descovy are daily pills, and Apretude is a shot given every two months. Of note, due to lack of evidence, Descovy is not yet indicated as PrEP for cisgender women and trans men. Generic (and much cheaper) versions of Truvada are available. A twice-yearly injectable, lenacapavir as PrEP, may be added to prevention options this summer, as clinical trial results have shown it to be highly effective in women, gay men and gender-diverse populations. To learn more about PrEP, see the POZ Basics on HIV Prevention: Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP).

Access to PrEP

A decade after the FDA's approval of Truvada for HIV prevention, PrEP has yet to reach its full potential. According to the CDC, of the 1.2 million people in the United States who could benefit, less than a third were prescribed PrEP in 2021.

While many urban white gay men have eagerly adopted PrEP, uptake has been slower for other groups. This is true for Black and Latino men who have sex with men, women of all races and ethnicities, adolescents and young adults and people living in rural areas. While Black people account for about 40% of new HIV cases in the United States, only 8% of those who could benefit received a PrEP prescription. For women and Latino people, the proportions with a PrEP prescription were 10% and 14%, respectively.

In related PrEP news, the Supreme Court is expected to rule this summer in a case involving insurance coverage of PrEP. Under the rules of the Affordable Care Act (ACA, or Obamacare), preventive health services that receive an A or B grade from the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) must be covered by health insurance. In August 2023, USPSTF gave all three PrEP forms of HIV prevention an A grade. However, conservatives have in recent years filed lawsuits challenging the ACA's mandate to cover preventive health services, ranging from PrEP to cancer screenings.

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