

## Medications to Prevent HIV Infection

Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) prevention (or prophylaxis) includes both safe sex practices and medications.

### Preventing the Spread of HIV

HIV can be spread through blood, semen, vaginal fluid, or breast milk. It is most often spread through sexual contact. Therefore, an important part of HIV prevention is practicing "safe sex." This involves using condoms and asking about (or being tested for) HIV and other sexually transmitted infections before any type of sex with a new partner.

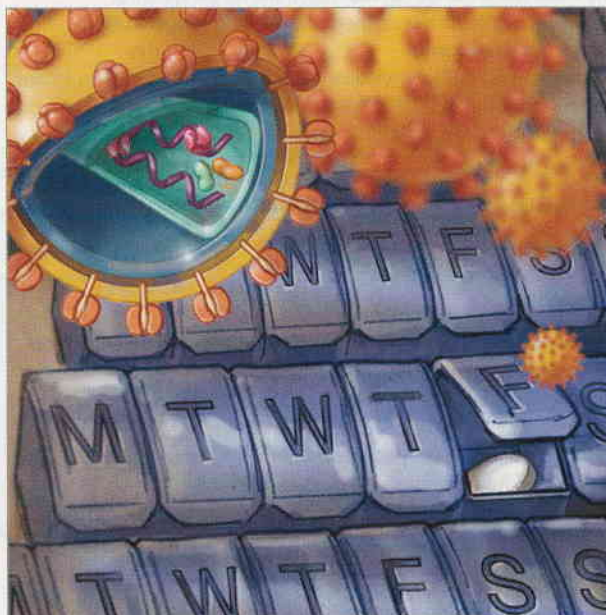
In some specific situations, medications can also be used to prevent HIV. These medications are **antiretroviral** (anti-HIV) pills. These pills are taken by people who do *not* have HIV infection but are at high risk of becoming infected. There are 2 types of HIV prophylaxis that involve the use of medications: **preexposure prophylaxis** and **postexposure prophylaxis**.

### Preexposure Prophylaxis

In preexposure prophylaxis, someone who does not have HIV infection takes 1 anti-HIV pill every day (a combination of 2 antiretroviral medications) as long as he or she is at high risk of getting infected with HIV. The medication can be taken for months or years. Those who may benefit from preexposure prophylaxis include

- People who are in a relationship with a partner who has HIV infection.
- People who have many sexual partners and do not regularly use condoms. This can include men and women and heterosexual, gay, or bisexual people.
- People who inject drugs.

Individuals who take preexposure prophylaxis still need to be regularly tested for HIV. The use of preexposure prophylaxis is still



sure prophylaxis is meant to be used in rare situations and not to be used repeatedly or for longer than 4 weeks.

### How Well Do These Medications Work?

Both preexposure and postexposure