

Health Equity Considerations for Doxycycline as STI PEP

Gay, bisexual, and other men who have sex with men (GBMSM) and transgender people experience higher rates of STIs than other populations, and the disparities are even larger for GBMSM and trans people of color. As an effective new prevention tool for cisgender GBMSM and transgender women, doxycycline as STI PEP has the potential to lessen health disparities. However, lessons learned from the introduction of PrEP for HIV and Jynneos as the Mpox vaccine demonstrate that an effective introduction of doxycycline as STI PEP will require careful attention to health equity.

The following are ways you can ensure your doxycycline as STI PEP program is equitable and prepared to serve your community.

Develop Equitable Criteria for Offering Doxycycline as STI PEP

Develop organization-wide criteria for when you will proactively offer doxycycline as STI PEP. For example, you may offer doxycycline as STI PEP to every GBMSM or transgender woman who has tested positive for syphilis or for a bacterial STI in the past six months. You may want to build counseling about doxycycline as STI PEP into certain routine visits.

Reduce Unnecessary Restrictions Based on Eligibility Criteria

During the 2022 Mpox Outbreak, public health officials learned that excessive vaccine restrictions based on sexual behavior deterred some people from getting the mpox vaccine. Remember that patients may not be willing to divulge sensitive information about sexual behavior because of stigma.

Proactively Offer Information about Doxycycline as STI PEP

Doxycycline as STI PEP is a new intervention. Some patients may have heard about it in the news while others may not know about it. Proactively informing patients rather than waiting for them to request it can facilitate more equitable distribution of doxycycline as STI PEP.

Address Existing Barriers to STI Services

Existing barriers to sexual health services – barriers that often increase disparities in STI rates and care – may also impact equitable access to doxycycline as STI PEP if you do not take steps to address them. Adopting certain health equity strategies can

make your doxycycline as STI PEP program more equitable for patients in your community, including:

- Offering flexible clinic hours, including weekends, evenings, and accommodation of walk-in appointments
- Incorporating telehealth visits and non-clinic-based, self-collect STI testing for follow-up
- Engaging in shared decision-making with patients who may benefit from doxycycline as STI PEP

Be Transparent in Your Messaging and Consider Patients' Information Needs

Clearly explain to patients what is known and what is still unknown about doxycycline as STI PEP. In counseling patients and in your consumer-facing materials, you should be sure to include potential side effects of doxycycline, the need for periodic STI testing, and that STI PEP is an off-label use for doxycycline.

Your patients may also be interested in more context about doxycycline as STI PEP, including:

- Doxycycline has been used as PEP for other medical uses, like in the prevention of Lyme disease.
- Doxycycline is not a new drug. Black, Latino, and other patients of color who may be aware of the history of unethical drug testing on people of color and medical racism may want to know that doxycycline is an older, well-known antibiotic.
- Doxycycline as STI PEP is a new use for an existing drug, and other providers and pharmacists may not be aware of doxycycline as STI PEP.

Educate Other Medical Providers and Pharmacies in Your Area

As a leader on STI prevention and treatment in your community, you can support your patients by taking an active role in increasing awareness, training, and education among area providers, including pharmacies, as well as to community-based organizations that serve GBMSM, transgender women, and people of color. Update these key stakeholders as new information is available. Be intentional about reaching out to rural, underfunded, and smaller community-based organizations and clinics in your region.

Engage the Local Community

Developing partnerships and building trust with community-based organizations is essential for equitable STI prevention, treatment, and care, and those relationships can provide a powerful source of feedback as you introduce doxycycline as STI PEP to patients in your community. Invite multiple community-based organizations to listen-and-learn sessions where they are provided with information on studies, protocols, and other key information on doxycycline as STI PEP. Hold space for listening as well as an opportunity to receive feedback on implementation protocols, patient and community materials, and messaging. Create a doxycycline as STI PEP community advisory group or engage existing advisory groups to provide regular feedback on your program and how it can be improved.

Communicating About Doxycycline as STI PEP

Doxycycline as STI PEP is empowering way individuals can have agency to prevent new bacterial STIs. You can partner with patients and community members to develop and test culturally reflective consumer messages that build awareness, create transparency, and clearly inform your community about doxycycline as STI PEP. Key information you may want to include in marketing materials and patient materials include:

- What doxycycline as STI PEP is and the benefits
- How to access doxycycline as STI PEP
- Side effects and safety information
- Costs of doxycycline as STI PEP and how to access it at low cost
- STI testing recommendations

Work with your community to make sure materials reflect patients who could benefit from doxycycline as STI PEP – GBMSM and transgender women – and that materials reflect the population in your area. Be sure your materials communicate in plain language and the language(s) your patients use most comfortably.