

Media Release

SA rallies behind PEP

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Five people in South Australia have been prescribed PEP since the launch of the PEP management system January 9th (as of February 11th).

And since the public education and awareness campaign about PEP (Post – Exposure Prophylaxis) began in early January, members of the gay community and people working in the HIV sector have been waiting to gauge the impact of the new campaign.

PEP is a 4 week course of medication taken to avoid HIV infection after possible exposure to the virus. This may be through unprotected anal sex or vaginal sex, broken or slipped condoms during protected anal sex or vaginal sex, or sharing injecting equipment with someone who is or could be HIV Positive.

PEP is not a 'morning after pill' and not a vaccine or cure for HIV/AIDS nor can it replace safe sex (using condoms and water-based lube) or safe injecting practices (not sharing needles and other injecting equipment).

PEP is only effective if accessed within 72 hours after possible exposure to the virus.

Other states have also revealed some interesting facts about PEP.

Figures for New South Wales show that Saturdays and Sundays are the days when people are most likely to present for and be started on PEP.

A conclusion that Friday and Saturday nights – peaks for sexual activity and drug and alcohol use that may lead to increased risk-taking behaviour – are the times when exposure to HIV is more likely to occur, can easily be drawn.

New South Wales figures also show that PEP was first prescribed to 14 people in 1999. The most recent NSW figures available – for 2006 – show that 174 people were prescribed PEP: that's 14+ people per month.

And in Western Australia there were 42 recorded PEP cases from January to December 2006. That's three to four people per month. Numbers for WA in 2007 are looking very similar.

It's early days yet in South Australia, but as the PEP awareness campaign and management system continue, the statistics they reveal will be closely monitored.

If you have any queries about PEP, call the PEP Hotline on 1800 022 226 or visit the PEP website at <http://www.acsa.org.au/PEP.html>

For information about HIV and other sexually transmissible infections (STIs) call the Man2Man Info Line (a service of Gay Men's Health) on 8334 1617. Country callers should call 1800 671 582.