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The number of people wishing to use pre-contact HIV prevention in Kazakhstan has more than doubled

 Every year, the number of adherents of pre-exposure HIV prevention (PREP) is growing in the country. If last year there were five thousand of them, this year there are more than 11 thousand people. PREP or PrEP is an effective way to prevent HIV transmission, provided it is regularly used by people without HIV.

- "PREP consists of taking the drug tenofovir/emtricitabine daily. Worldwide studies show that PrEP drugs reduce the risk of HIV transmission by 99%. Drugs can be obtained free of charge and confidentially from regional HIV prevention centers and non-governmental public organizations. Migrants can buy in pharmacies by prescription from doctors of HIV prevention centers or private medical centers," said Ulugbek Medeubekov, Acting Director of the Kazakh Scientific Center for Dermatology and Infectious Diseases of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Kazakhstan (KNCDIZ).

As is known, HIV in the country is spread mainly in key population groups. Therefore, PREP is relevant primarily for people who use drugs, men who have sex with men, sex workers, trans people, discordant couples (one of the partners with HIV). Access to key populations is difficult due to stigma and discrimination. For this reason, many are afraid to contact medical organizations. Therefore, PREP is available from 2023 in NGOs. Six friendly NGOs provide drugs through medical professionals, two have received a medical license. The joint activities of doctors and equal navigators from among NGOs are actively carried out through chatbots, websites, social networks and outreach work.

Since last year, registration for those wishing to take PREP has been simplified in the country: only a negative HIV test result and screening of HIV symptoms are required. This is a significant plus for increasing the motivation of those who have not yet decided to take PrEP.

The next step in popularizing PREP is to increase the effective partnership of physicians with the community. This is the expansion and diversification of models at the community level, including medical licensing of services for NGOs, and the development of information materials. The ambitious goal is to provide the service to more than 22 thousand people by 2027.

Choosing PREP is a right that anyone at risk of infection can use. And successes in the HIV response are closely linked to progress in protecting human rights and strengthening the health system.

From November 20 to December 1 (World AIDS Day), the country will host a campaign under the UNAIDS motto "Choose the right path – the path of human rights". Respect for the rights of everyone is the basis for an effective response to HIV. This World AIDS Day is a call to action to protect everyone's health through the protection of everyone's rights.

Kazakhstan is constantly improving national legislation on the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of HIV infection. People living with HIV can adopt children. Antiretroviral therapy is provided at the expense of the State. An HIV test can be taken at the clinic at the place of attachment or at the regional HIV Prevention Center confidentially, free of charge and, if desired, anonymously.

During the campaign, by December 1, actions, round tables, flash mobs and other events will be held in all regions of the country to promote knowledge about HIV prevention, prevention of stigma and discrimination against people affected by HIV. Open Days for the population will be held in regional HIV Prevention Centers. Everyone will be able to get expert advice and get tested for HIV.

On November 26, an international scientific and practical conference "Innovative measures for HIV prevention and treatment: policy, research, practice" will be held in Almaty. This event with the participation of well-known international and domestic experts will be an important step towards strengthening sanitary and epidemiological control and improving modern approaches to the prevention of HIV, concomitant, as well as dermatovenereological diseases.

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