

PRE-EXPOSURE PROPHYLAXIS COUNSELLING IN A SEXUAL HEALTH CLINIC FOR MEN WHO HAVE SEX WITH MEN IN LISBON, PORTUGAL

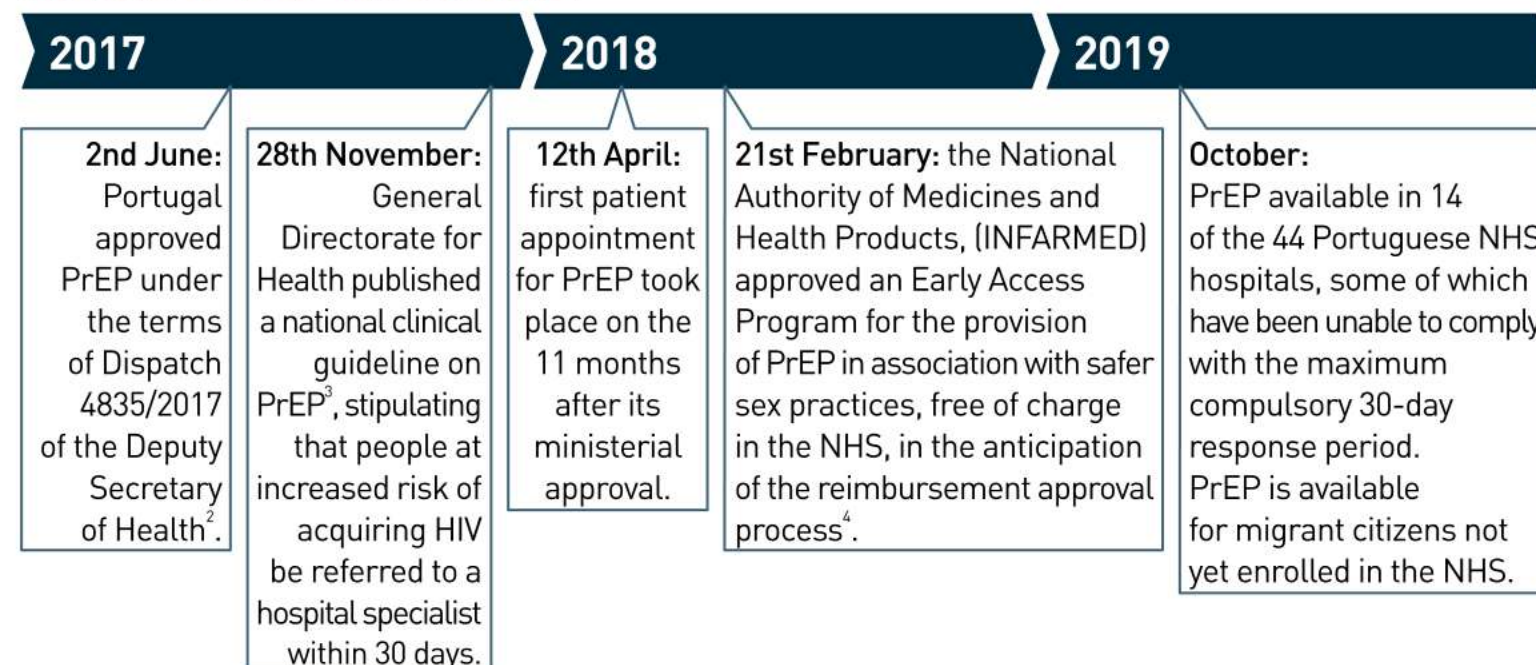


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BACKGROUND

Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is defined as the use of antiretroviral drugs to prevent human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) acquisition by uninfected individuals¹.

HISTORY OF PrEP IN PORTUGAL



METHODS

Data were collected by qualified peer counsellors and inserted in a database: sociodemographic data, behavioral characteristics, immunization and prior STI testing records, and data related to PrEP follow up.

For formal PrEP, the General-Directorate for Health's PrEP guidelines checklist was used. STI screening was subsequently performed, as indicated in the clinical guideline. Men who returned for follow up were offered STI retesting at 3-month intervals or as appropriate.

Two populations:

- Wild PrEP / non-prescribed by a physician (data collected from May 2015 until May 2018);
- Formal PrEP / prescribed by a physician (data collected from May 2018 to September 2018).

Between April and May there was an overlap for both populations.

RESULTS

WILD PrEP

From May 2015 until the end of May 2018, prior to the introduction of formal PrEP in Portugal, CheckpointLX had a total of 90 appointments for Wild PrEP, of which 64 (71%) were first time visits and the remaining were follow up visits.

Most were born in Portugal (n = 41, 64%), while 7 (11%) were born at Brazil.

The mean age was 40 years old (SD 9.5 years) and almost all (n = 58, 91%) self-identified as homosexual.

- 41 (64%) were vaccinated against Hepatitis B virus at admission.
- 24 (38%) were vaccinated against Hepatitis A virus.
- 7 (11%) were vaccinated against Human Papilloma Virus with either quadrivalent or 9-valent vaccines.
- 24 (38%) had a self-reported history of an STI in the past 12-month period, syphilis being the most common (n = 9, 38%).
- 40 (63%) reported more than 10 sexual partners over the past 12-month period.
- 35 (55%) had at least one instance of sex with multiple partners in the same period.
- 33 (52%) reported inhaled drug use.

FORMAL PrEP

380 service users were referred to the NHS following formal introduction of PrEP.

- Most were Portuguese (n = 318, 84%), and the mean age was 31 (8.9) years old.
- Eligibility criteria was available for a subset of 71 users, 58% of whom fulfilled 1 criterion only, followed by 30% who fulfilled 2 criteria.
- Condomless sex in the last six months with partners of unknown HIV status was the most common eligibility criteria (n = 59, 83%), followed by sex under the influence of alcohol and drugs (n = 25, 35%).

DISCUSSION

- First study to describe the use of PrEP in MSM in Portugal.
- A total of 97% of Wild PrEP users had been tested for HIV in the past three months, showing most were seeking follow up care at adequate intervals.
- 38% had an STI diagnosis in the past 12-month period, 63% reported having 10 or more sexual partners and 73% reported inconsistent condom use in the same period, attesting to their high risk of acquiring HIV.
- PrEP delivery needs to be complemented with effective information regarding the importance of immunization in the scope of broader preventive sexual health care.
- There is enough data to show an unmet need in providing formal PrEP for migrant citizens; therefore efforts should be made to include them in the free of charge NHS PrEP program.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Much remains to be done to ensure that PrEP is available to those in need. According to data from the Lisbon MSM cohort (n = 5,447), a variable number of MSM would be eligible for PrEP in Portugal: 2485 (45.6%) according to EACS 2017 guidelines, 2929 (53.8%), according to WHO 2017 guidelines, and 3556 (65.3%) according to CDC 2014 guidelines⁵.
- PrEP should also be made available at the community level, as a complement to hospital delivery, as it can increase the availability and uptake of PrEP.

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Promoters



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