

Bill would let youth get HIV prevention meds on their own

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HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — Connecticut lawmakers were asked Monday to consider letting young people receive preventative medication for HIV infections without their parents' consent.

Advocates told the Public Health Committee that such legislation could help those seeking the drug but don't feel comfortable discussing their sexual activities with their parents. Some parents expressed concern that they were being cut out.

Current state law allows minors to be tested for HIV — the virus that causes AIDS — and receive treatment if they test positive without parental consent. This bill would allow the preventative drug, referred to as pre-exposure prophylaxis or PrEP, to be prescribed.

Twenty-year-old Samuel Smith of New Haven told lawmakers he wished they had passed the legislation three years ago. He was diagnosed as HIV-positive during the final days of his senior year of high school in 2016 and said such a law could have helped him avoid the virus. At the time, his parents didn't know he was sexually active with men, and he had no intention of telling them.

"Like many people in the gay community, I had known about PrEP, but as a minor I was not able to consent to preventative prophylaxis treatments," he said. "I felt that keeping my personal life a secret was more important than my own health. So I did not seek out a prescription for PrEP."

With the brand name Truvada, the medicine consists of a single daily pill. The Centers for Disease Control said PrEP has been shown to reduce the risk of HIV infection in high-risk individuals by up to 92 percent, when taken consistently. Patients are urged to follow up with a health care provider every three months.

According to the federal agency, minors can access PrEP independently in 16 states, based on explicit language in state law and regulations. The age for access varies by jurisdiction.

Rep. Jeff Currey, D-East Hartford, who co-sponsored the legislation that would add Connecticut to that list, told lawmakers he could relate to Smith's story.

"When you are a young gay person, it is not easy to have that conversation with your parent or your guardian," he said. "I didn't come out until I was 20 years old. So that was a number of years in which I could have been putting myself at risk."

But some parents on Monday voiced concern that this and a much broader bill concerning the prophylactic treatment of minors for sexually transmitted diseases could ultimately usurp parental control.

Shannon Gamache of Ashford questioned whether adolescents would follow the drug's protocol, adding how she has not found any long-term studies about the drug's effectiveness in young people.

"The separation of parental authority and state authority needs to be clear," she said. "You cannot inject anything or medicate our children without our permission."

The bill awaits committee action.

CCA Note: State Representatives Jeff Currey and Raghbir Allie-Brennan, in collaboration with the Center for Children's Advocacy and Dr. Krystn Wagner of Fair Haven Community Health Care, introduced this initiative in the General Assembly's Public Health Committee. To learn more about this bill and other CCA initiatives, please go to cca-ct.org/legislative.