

# HEPATITIS B and C Factsheet

## for Indigenous Communities

### What is hepatitis and how common is it?

Hepatitis B and C are two different viruses which cause inflammation of the liver.

- **One out of every 12 Indigenous Australians has chronic hepatitis B or C**
- Over 26,000 Indigenous Australians have chronic hepatitis B, and another 16,000 have chronic hepatitis C
- Across Australia, 165,000 people have chronic hepatitis B, and 212,000 have chronic hepatitis C
- Globally, one out of every 12 people are living with chronic hepatitis B or C.

### Is there a vaccination?

Hepatitis B can be prevented through a safe and effective vaccination. **A vaccination is all it takes to protect you and your family against hepatitis B.**

- The hepatitis B vaccine is offered to all babies born in Australia, and to school children aged 10-13 years
- Hepatitis B vaccinations are also available to all Australians from GPs, most Aboriginal Medical Services, Sexual Health Clinics and, Family Planning Clinics
- Unfortunately, there is no vaccine available yet for hepatitis C.

### How do you get hepatitis B and C?

Hepatitis B and C can both be passed on through any form of blood to blood contact. Additionally, hepatitis B can also be easily passed on through unprotected sexual contact. Hepatitis B and C are not passed on through casual contact such as hugging, shaking hands, or sharing food or cutlery.

Hepatitis B:

- There are a high number of people with hepatitis B in some rural and remote Indigenous communities. In these communities, hepatitis B can be passed on from mother-to-baby at birth, or between infected family members and children in the home
- All pregnant women are now tested for hepatitis B, and vaccinations are given to the baby to help prevent transmission from mother to baby
- In adults, new infections can occur through unprotected sexual contact, or through the sharing of unsterile drug injecting equipment.

Hepatitis C:

- Sharing unsterile drug injecting equipment is the most common way to get hepatitis C in Australia. Other risks include unsterile body art, piercings, or blood rituals
- As there are very high rates of hepatitis C in Australian prisons, people who have spent any time in prison are at increased risk of having contracted hepatitis C.

To speak to somebody about hepatitis C  
call **1300 437 222 (1300 HEP ABC)**

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### How will I know if I have chronic hepatitis B or C?

You may have hepatitis B or C and not know it. Talk to your AMS about testing.

- The only way to know if you have hepatitis B or C is to get tested. People with chronic hepatitis B or C often do not know they have been infected, and feel well for many years until they develop more advanced liver disease
- Symptoms of liver disease include tiredness, abdominal pain, nausea and loss of appetite.

### If you have chronic hepatitis B or C, how serious is it?

Chronic hepatitis B and C are slowly progressing, but very serious liver diseases.

- **If left untreated, hepatitis B or C can cause serious liver disease and cancer**
- Between them, around the world, over one million people die each year from chronic hepatitis B and C.

### Is there an effective treatment available for chronic hepatitis B or C?

Both hepatitis B and C can be managed and treated. Talk to your AMS about treatment.

Hepatitis C:

- Treatment for hepatitis C has improved – up to 80% of people can be cured (depending on genotype)

- Hepatitis C treatment involves a combination of weekly injections with interferon, and daily tablets of Ribavirin
- Many people need increased support while undergoing treatment.

Hepatitis B:

- Hepatitis B can be managed and treated, however, there is no cure. Like diabetes, the aim of hepatitis B treatment and management is to keep the virus under control rather than provide a cure
- All people diagnosed with chronic hepatitis B need regular tests and clinical assessments to see if treatment is required to reduce their risk of cirrhosis (liver scarring), and liver cancer.

### What can people with chronic hepatitis B do to look after their liver health?

- Stay in contact with your AMS or GP, and have regular tests even if you feel well
- Talk to your doctor before taking any herbal or complementary medicines, as some are very harmful to the liver
- Exercise and eat a healthy diet to help you maintain a normal body weight
- Avoid alcohol and tobacco.

For more information about viral hepatitis visit

[www.hepatitisaustralia.com](http://www.hepatitisaustralia.com)  
or call 1300 437 222

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