

Should I still have my regular chronic hepatitis B check-ups during the COVID-19 pandemic?



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The short answer is **YES**.

Why should you get your check-ups?

It is to make sure that your doctor can identify any changes in your liver such as damage occurring, or any further damage.

Chronic Hepatitis B is a chronic disease affecting the liver. Currently it cannot be cured but needs regular check-ups to monitor any changes on your liver. You may not show any signs or feel any symptoms even if your liver has been damaged. Regular tests including blood tests, FibroScan and ultrasound tests can check and find out if there have been any changes.

Your doctor may use telehealth to help you during this time.

What is telehealth?

Telehealth is using either a telephone or video call for consultations, you do not need to go to see your doctor in person. If needed, your doctor can email or post you a prescription or a test request form for blood tests or FibroScan and ultrasound tests.

What could happen if you don't have your regular check-ups?

It could put you at risk of significant long-term liver damage even liver cancer. Your doctor is the only person who can say if it is safe to miss a test.

How can you have tests with current restrictions for going out?

You still can go out if you need to:

- Attend medical appointments
- Go to the pharmacy
- Buy food when needed
- Exercise

Is it safe for you to go to the clinic if the doctor wants to see you?

- **Yes.** All doctors and medical centre staff are taking precautions to protect their patients and themselves and will not put you at risk.
- Avoid taking other family members such as children to the appointment unless you need a person to assist you with transport, language and so on, or if they are unwell and you have made an appointment for them.

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Can you take the bus to your appointment?

It is best to avoid public transport wherever possible. If you do not have any other way of getting there make sure you maintain social distancing such as:

- sit away from other passengers, keep at least 1.5 meters from other people
- try not to touch surfaces on the bus
- use your elbow to press the button to stop the bus
- cover your mouth and nose if you need to cough or sneeze (either into your elbow or use a tissue and throw in the bin once you leave the bus)
- do not touch your face at anytime
- wash your hands for at least 20 seconds using soap or use hand sanitiser if you cannot access water and soap

What to do if you are running out of hepatitis B medications?

If you are going to run out of medications and do not have any more prescriptions, you need to contact your doctor as soon as possible. If your doctor does not need to see you in person, they may be able to write the prescription via telehealth and you can either:

- Collect it from the doctor's clinic - it will be safe to do so
- Ask if they can send it to your chosen chemist/pharmacy
- Ask if they can post or email it to you

Can you go to the chemist/pharmacy to get your medications?

Yes. Where possible phone them beforehand to ask if they can prepare the medications before you get there. This will reduce the amount of time you need to be there. Also, they will be able to make sure they have the medication in stock. If they do not have the medicine in stock, they can let you know when it will be available.

Is it safe for you to get blood tests and ultrasounds for hepatitis B?

Yes. Unless you need to fast for your blood tests it is best to avoid early in the morning. The pathology services (for blood tests) are taking precautions to protect their patients thus it is safe to go. If you usually have your blood tests at the hospital it is best to go there, to avoid paying additional fees.

Radiology services (for ultrasounds) are also taking precautions to protect their patients. You will need to make an appointment for your ultrasound.

FibroScan can still be performed by ECCQ either at their West End office or in some GP practices. The staff at ECCQ are taking precautions to protect clients and themselves from the COVID-19 virus.

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It is best to avoid taking other people such as family members and children to these appointments unless necessary.

Can you take herbal, complementary or traditional medicines to protect against the COVID-19 virus if you have hepatitis B?

You should ask your doctor before you take any herbal, complementary or traditional medicines. Because some herbs and complementary or traditional medicines can cause damage and make your hepatitis B worse.



How can we help?

ECCQ's Hepatitis, HIV/AIDS and Sexual Health Program provides free Hepatitis, HIV/AIDS and STIs information, resources and support in different languages. Please contact us at:

Website: eccq.com.au/health

Phone: 07 3844 9166

Email: health@eccq.com.au

You can also contact our staff directly who speaks your language:

Staff Name	Language we speak	Phone	Email
Angeline	French, Kirundi, Kinyarwanda, English	0481 838 692	angelinem@eccq.com.au
Christine	Acholi, Juba Arabic, Swahili, English	0479 036 383	christineo@eccq.com.au
Daniel	Dinka, Arabic, Juba Arabic, English	0479 062 234	daniela@eccq.com.au
Evelyn	Burmese, English	0481 827 751	evelynp@eccq.com.au
Iqbal	Dari, English	0403 681 929	iqbalp@eccq.com.au
Lazaro	Swahili, Kirundi, English	0479 153 742	lazarok@eccq.com.au
Samantha	Chinese, English	0479 130 997	chinese@eccq.com.au
Tam	Vietnamese, English	0428 223 052	vietnamese@eccq.com.au

If you live in Cairns, you can also contact:

HIV, Viral Hepatitis, Sexual Health Coordinator

Cairns Sexual Health Service

381 Sheridan St, Cairns North, QLD, 4870

Phone: 07 4226 4760

Further information about telehealth can be found at <http://www.mbsonline.gov.au>.

Updated information about COVID-19 can be found at www.covid19.qld.gov.au

Updated information about how the Australian government helps and supports people during the COVID-19 pandemic can be found at www.australia.gov.au