

Viral Hepatitis and COVID-19

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Both viral Hepatitis and COVID-19 are infectious diseases caused by viruses. They are caused by different viruses. Hepatitis is caused by hepatitis viruses and COVID-19 is caused by a coronavirus - SARS-CoV-2 (Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus 2). They can both be transmitted from person to person but through very different ways. They also differ in testing, treatment and prevention.

How can viral hepatitis and COVID-19 be spread?

Viral Hepatitis

Viral hepatitis affects the liver and the three most common viral hepatitis are: hepatitis A, hepatitis B, hepatitis C. They have different transmission routes:

- Hepatitis A- caused by hepatitis A virus - is transmitted by consuming food and drinks contaminated with the hepatitis A virus.
- Hepatitis B – caused by hepatitis B virus - is transmitted by blood to blood contact, from mother to baby at birth and through sexual contact.
- Hepatitis C – caused by hepatitis C virus - is transmitted mainly through blood contact. Very rarely is it transmitted from mother to baby at birth.

COVID-19

COVID-19 is a new infectious disease which was first identified late last year in China and it affects the lungs. It is caused by a new coronavirus called SARS-CoV-2. At present, it is believed that this virus is mainly spread from person-to-person through close contact with an infected person or touching surfaces and objects contaminated with the virus due to droplets from a cough or sneeze from an infected person. However, we are still learning more about how COVID-19 is spread.

How do you know you have viral hepatitis and COVID-19?

Viral hepatitis can be tested and diagnosed through specific blood tests called hepatitis A test, hepatitis B test and hepatitis C test, respectively.

At present, COVID-19 is tested and diagnosed through a specific test by collecting samples from the respiratory tract.

What are the consequences of these diseases?

Viral Hepatitis

- Hepatitis A: is a short term infection and people can recover without treatment. Very few people can die from hepatitis A. It has no long term effects on health.

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- Hepatitis B: can be a short term (less than 6 months) or long term (over six months) infection. A long term hepatitis B infection is called chronic hepatitis B. Some people with chronic hepatitis B can develop liver cancer, liver cirrhosis and liver failure without regular monitoring or treatment when needed.
- Hepatitis C: can be a short term (less than 6 months) or long term (over six months) infection. Some people with chronic hepatitis C can develop liver cancer, cirrhosis or liver failure without treatment. Hepatitis C can be cured by treatment.

COVID-19

As it is a new disease, we have limited knowledge about COVID-19. Current information tells us that many people with the infection, especially younger people, will generally experience a mild infection. However, older people or people with other health conditions such as diabetes, heart disease and lung disease such as asthma are at higher risk of becoming severely ill after being infected with COVID-19.

The overall death rate reported for COVID-19 is over 3%. However, it varies from country to country.

Is there treatment for viral hepatitis and COVID-19?

Viral Hepatitis

Hepatitis A: there is no treatment and people can recover from the infection by themselves.

Hepatitis B: there are effective treatments but once started these need to be taken for life.

Hepatitis C: there are highly effective treatments and over 95% of people who have treatment will be cured.

COVID-19

There is no specific treatment for COVID-19 yet.

How to prevent viral hepatitis and COVID-19?

Viral Hepatitis

Hepatitis A: a hepatitis A vaccine is available. It is also important to **ALWAYS** wash your hands with soap and water after going to toilet and before preparing and eating food.

Hepatitis B: a hepatitis B vaccine is available. It is also important to avoid blood contact and practice safe sex.

Hepatitis C: there is no vaccine available. It is very important to avoid blood contact.

COVID-19

There is no vaccine for COVID-19. The following ways can help you to reduce the risk of getting COVID-19:

- wash your hands with soap and water **properly and frequently** (at least 20 seconds each time), or use an alcohol-based hand rub
- cover coughs and sneezes using tissues, or your elbow if tissues are not available

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- try to keep 1.5 meters distance between you and other people
- avoid touching your mouth, nose and eyes
- follow all the restrictions advised by the Australian/Queensland Government relating to travel, non-essential gatherings including attending places of worship and social visits etc.

What should I do if I have chronic hepatitis?

In addition to taking precautions to protect yourself from getting COVID-19, you also need to:

- Keep taking your medication if you are on the treatment.
- Do not cancel your appointments except you have been advised by your doctor.
- Phone your doctor prior to your medical appointment if you have flu like symptoms and follow your doctor's instructions.
- Have the flu vaccine when it is available.
- Stay up to date with latest recommendations provided by the Government and Health Departments to protect yourself from COVID-19.

You can find the latest COVID-19 information at the following websites:

www.health.gov.au

www.health.qld.gov.au

www.australia.gov.au

www.who.int

More information about Viral Hepatitis

Please contact Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland (ECCQ):

Website: eccq.com.au/health

Phone: 07 3844 9166

Email: health@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

