

Is there treatment for hepatitis B?

Yes, hepatitis B treatment is very effective but it is not a cure. Not all people with hepatitis B need treatment. However, **all people with chronic hepatitis B should have regular check-ups** (every 6 or 12 months and sometimes more often) **with their doctor for the rest of their life.** This is the best way to prevent liver cirrhosis and liver cancer caused by chronic hepatitis B.

How can people protect themselves from hepatitis B?

The **hepatitis B vaccine** is the best way to prevent people from getting hepatitis B.

If you don't know your status, it is very important for you to see your doctor to get a hepatitis B test as soon as possible.

Please contact us at health@eccq.com.au or download a copy of the **B Healthy** Booklet and **Let's Talk About It** booklet from the website for further information. You can also ask us to send you hard copies for free.



Contact Us

Website: www.eccq.com.au/bbv

Phone: **07 3844 9166**

Fax: **07 3846 4453**

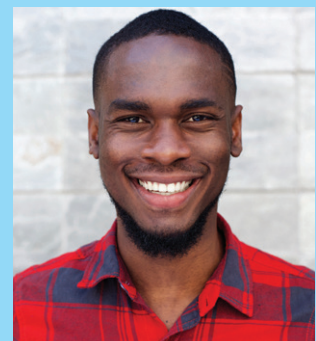
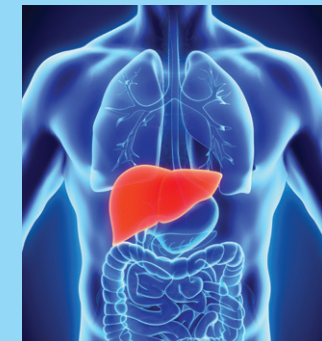
Email: health@eccq.com.au



eccq
Ethnic Communities
Council of Queensland

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Liver Disease Hepatitis B



What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a potentially life-threatening liver infection caused by the hepatitis B virus. It is one of five viral hepatitis infections: hepatitis A, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, hepatitis D and hepatitis E. Of these, hepatitis A, hepatitis B and hepatitis C are the most common.

Hepatitis B can be an acute (a short-term infection lasting less than six months) or a chronic infection (a long-term infection lasting more than 6 months).

How common is hepatitis B in Australia?

Acute hepatitis B is not common, but chronic hepatitis B is very common among people born overseas, especially people from Asian and African countries.



Are people tested for hepatitis B before they come to Australia?

Most people are not required to be tested for hepatitis B before moving to Australia either permanently or temporarily. Therefore, you should get tested if you don't know whether you have hepatitis B or not.

How does hepatitis B affect people?

Acute hepatitis B doesn't cause long term health problems. However, approximately 25% of people with chronic hepatitis B can develop serious liver disease including **liver failure** (the liver stops working), **liver cirrhosis** (scarring of the liver), **liver cancer** and **even death**. These can be prevented if people with chronic hepatitis B have regular check-ups with their doctors, and take treatment if required.

How can people get hepatitis B?

People **can** get hepatitis B through:

- **Mother-to-baby** transmission: a pregnant woman with hepatitis B can pass the virus to her baby during the birth process. It is the most common way to get hepatitis B in many countries. However, hepatitis B is not a genetic disease. Therefore mother-to-baby transmission can be prevented by giving hepatitis B vaccine and hepatitis B immune globulin to the baby at birth.
- **Blood** transmission: there are many ways people can get hepatitis B through blood, even when the blood isn't visible. For example, sharing items like razors and toothbrushes; unsterile medical equipment, body piercings and tattooing.
- **Sexual** transmission: hepatitis B can also be spread through sex, but less than 5% of adults develop chronic hepatitis B after being infected.

People **cannot** get hepatitis B through other contacts such as sharing food, shaking hands, kissing, breastfeeding, hugging, using toilets or mosquito/insects bite.



How do people know if they have hepatitis B?

The only way for people to know whether they have hepatitis B or not, is to have a blood test for hepatitis B. **This test is not included in the general blood tests;** you need to ask your doctor to do specific hepatitis tests including: **hepatitis B surface antigen, hepatitis B surface antibody** and **hepatitis B core antibody**. All GPs can order these tests. The tests are free if you have a Medicare card.

People with hepatitis B normally don't feel or look sick, therefore, many people with hepatitis B don't know they have it. In Australia, **around 1 in 4 people with chronic hepatitis B do not know they have it.**

If a person has hepatitis B it is **very important for all family members and other close contacts/partners** to be tested for hepatitis B.

