

Viral Hepatitis Update

Information for primary health care practitioners

Key points:

- Testing for hepatitis B or C in patients with a risk factor is covered under Medicare – there are no limits on the number of patients that can be tested
- All patients with chronic hepatitis B infection should be regularly monitored
- All patients with chronic hepatitis C infection should be offered treatment
- Appropriate management of viral hepatitis prevents hepatocellular carcinoma and liver failure

Chronic Hepatitis B

Who?¹

- Adults born in Asia, Pacific, Africa, Middle East, Eastern Europe & most of South America
- Aboriginal adults
- Adults who have ever been incarcerated, injected drugs, had multiple sex partners
- Anyone who requests testing

How?

- Request hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg), surface antibody (Anti-HBs) and core antibody (Anti-HBc)
- Write “? Chronic hepatitis B” on the request form

What next?

- Patients that have hepatitis B surface antigen have chronic hepatitis B.
- Follow your local HealthPathway or ASHM² decision guide to assess disease phase, develop a monitoring plan, and appropriate referral to specialist care.

Interpreting hepatitis B serology:

	Susceptible	Immune – prior infection	Immune – prior vaccination	Chronic infection	Indeterminate
HBsAg	Negative	Negative	Negative	Positive	Negative
Anti-HBc	Negative	Positive	Negative	Positive	Positive
Anti-HBs	Negative	Positive	Positive	Negative	Negative
Action	Consider vaccination	Cleared infection	No further action	Stage and monitor	Request liver clinic advice

Chronic Hepatitis C

Who?¹

- Adults born in South East Asia, Middle East, Eastern Europe, Africa
- Aboriginal adults
- Adults who have ever been incarcerated or injected drugs
- People who received blood or blood products before 1990
- Anyone who requests testing

How?

- If hepatitis C antibody status unknown, request hepatitis C antibody;
- Write “? Chronic hepatitis C” on the request form.
- If positive recall patient and request hepatitis C RNA

What next?

- Patients that have hepatitis C antibody AND are RNA positive have chronic hepatitis C and should be offered treatment with direct acting antivirals.
- Direct acting antivirals can be prescribed by GPs. Follow your local HealthPathway¹ to engage with local liver specialists and initiate your patient on treatment.

More information and help

Many NSW liver clinics are working with local public health units and may contact you to offer support for newly diagnosed patients OR visit the NSW Hepatitis B and C Strategies website: www.health.nsw.gov.au/hepatitis

¹ For complete list of who to test see “risk factors” in your local hepatitis B or C HealthPathway – for access see <https://www.healthpathwayscommunity.org/Home/AccessToHealthPathways.aspx>

² Australian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine: www.ashm.org.au