



Let's Talk About It...

English

Hepatitis, HIV and Sexually
Transmissible Infections (STIs)

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Let's Talk About It...

Hepatitis, HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) and STIs (Sexually Transmissible Infections) are health problems in many countries, including Australia. People who were born, have lived or have travelled overseas may be at higher risk of getting some of these infections. Many people with these infections look and feel healthy, and may not know that they have been infected. This booklet provides information about these infections and the importance of being tested early and getting treatment if necessary.

Hepatitis

Hepatitis

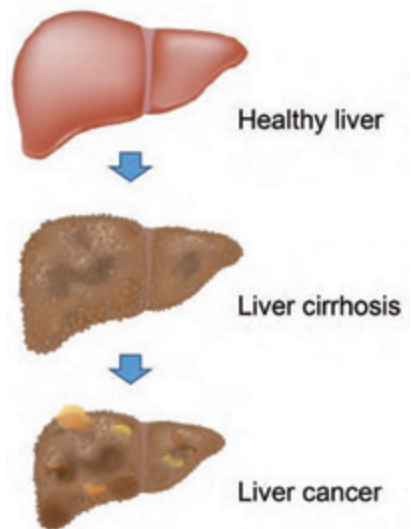
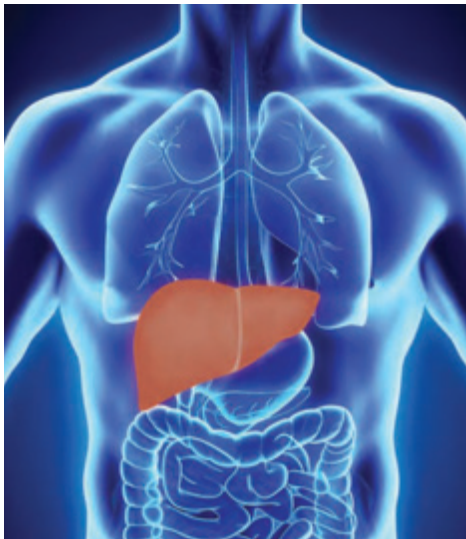
What is Hepatitis?

Hepatitis is a very common liver disease, and means inflammation (swelling) of the liver. The liver is the largest organ inside the body, and has many functions. For example, it clears toxins and chemicals from the blood; stores vitamins; helps digestion and processes food into nutrients.

Hepatitis can be caused by:

- Viruses
- Too much alcohol
- Some drugs/chemicals
- Other diseases such as fatty liver

Hepatitis caused by viruses is called **viral hepatitis**. It is the most common form of hepatitis in the world and can spread from person to person. There are five main types of viral hepatitis: hepatitis A, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, hepatitis D and hepatitis E. Of these, the most common ones are **hepatitis A, hepatitis B and hepatitis C**. They are caused by different viruses and have different transmission routes, tests, treatment and prevention. This booklet provides detailed information about the three most common types of viral hepatitis.



Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is caused by the hepatitis A virus (HAV). It is not common in Australia but very common in many other countries. Hepatitis A is only a short-term infection, and does not cause long-term liver damage. If people have had hepatitis A once, they will be immune (protected) for life, and will not get it again.

How do people get hepatitis A?

The hepatitis A virus is found in faeces (poo). It is transmitted through **food or drink** that is contaminated with faeces containing the hepatitis A virus. This is more likely to happen in countries where food and water are not safe and can easily be infected by germs such as the hepatitis A virus. It can also happen if infected people have poor hygiene, such as not washing hands after going to the toilet, or touching contaminated objects, as they may pass the virus onto food they prepare. Sometimes people in Australia can get hepatitis A from eating contaminated food brought in from overseas, or from people who have travelled or lived overseas recently.

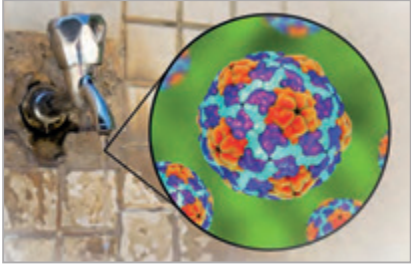
What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?

People with hepatitis A usually do not have any symptoms, especially children. But some people may have symptoms such as:

- Fever
- Fatigue (feeling tired)
- Loss of appetite (not feeling hungry)
- Nausea (feeling like you want to vomit)
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark-coloured urine
- Grey-coloured stools (poo)
- Joint pain
- Jaundice (yellow skin, yellow eyes)

How do people know if they have hepatitis A?

The only way for people to know if they have hepatitis A is to have a **blood test for hepatitis A** (it is different from common blood tests). All General Practitioners (GPs - medical doctors who are the first contact for all daily health matters) can order the test.



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

People are not required to have a test for hepatitis A before coming to Australia.

How does hepatitis A affect people?

Some people may feel unwell if they have hepatitis A, but it cannot cause long-term damage to the liver, and deaths caused by hepatitis A are very rare.

Is there treatment for hepatitis A?

No. There is no treatment for hepatitis A. Most people with hepatitis A need to:

- Rest
- Drink plenty of water
- Avoid smoking
- Avoid drinking alcohol

Some people may feel very sick when they have hepatitis A and may require treatment for their symptoms.

How can people protect themselves from hepatitis A?

There is a vaccine for hepatitis A. Vaccination is the best way to prevent hepatitis A. The hepatitis A vaccine involves 2 injections (the second injection should be between 6-18 months after the first injection). People can get the vaccine from their GP and most people need to pay for it.

If a person has already been vaccinated for hepatitis A, or had hepatitis A in the past, they already have immunity (protection) and do not need the hepatitis A vaccine.

You can also reduce the risk by having good hygiene including always washing hands after going to the toilet and before preparing food; drinking boiled or bottled water and eating cooked food while travelling in countries where water and food may be unsafe.

Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV), and it is a major health problem among people who were born in areas where hepatitis B is common, such as Asia, the Pacific Islands, Africa, the Middle East and parts of South America. Many people coming to Australia may have been infected with hepatitis B in their home country without knowing it.

Hepatitis B can be an **acute** infection (a short-term infection lasting less than six months) or a **chronic** infection (a long-term infection lasting over six months). Some people (most adults) with acute hepatitis B can clear the virus naturally from their body within six months and don't become chronic. This means they have immunity (protection) and cannot get hepatitis B again.

People who cannot clear the virus within six months will usually have hepatitis B for life (chronic hepatitis B). The chance of developing chronic hepatitis B depends on the age when first infected by the virus: about 80-90% of infants, 30% of children and less than 5% of adults infected with the hepatitis B virus will develop chronic hepatitis B. Babies and children who are infected are more likely to develop a chronic infection.

Both people with acute or chronic hepatitis B can pass the virus on to others.

How do people get hepatitis B?



People can get hepatitis B through:

- Mother-to-baby transmission – a pregnant woman with hepatitis B can pass the hepatitis B virus to her baby during birth. In many countries, this is the most common way to get hepatitis B.
- Blood transmission – there are many ways people can get hepatitis B through contact with infected blood, even a very small amount. For example:
 - Unsterile medical equipment – in some countries medical equipment such as needles and syringes may not be sterilised properly (sterilisation is a process to kill viruses) after use. Therefore, viruses can be spread to another person when the same instrument is used again. In Australia, medical equipment is safer due to strict health policies and higher standards.
 - Sharing personal care items that may have blood on them, for example, razors and toothbrushes.
 - Body or ear piercing and tattooing (if the equipment is not sterilised).
 - Cultural practices and traditional treatments that involve cutting or piercing the skin (if the equipment or tools used are not sterilised).
 - Child-to-child and close family contact, normally through contact with open sores, cuts or wounds.
 - Blood transfusion or blood products, in countries where blood and blood products are not tested for the hepatitis B virus. In Australia, all blood and blood products are carefully tested to make sure they are safe.
 - Sharing injecting drug equipment.
- Sexual transmission - hepatitis B can also be passed on through sex. However, the chance of an adult developing a chronic infection is very low (less than 5%).



People **cannot get** hepatitis B through the following ways:

- Sharing food and drinks
- Sharing plates and cups
- Shaking hands
- Hugging
- Kissing
- Coughing
- Sneezing
- Using public toilets or swimming pools
- Breastfeeding
- Mosquito bites

What are the symptoms of hepatitis B?

Most people with hepatitis B do not have any symptoms. In Australia nearly 40% of people with hepatitis B do not know they have it; however, some people may experience one or more of the symptoms similar to Hepatitis A (please refer to the previous section "What are the symptoms of hepatitis A?").

How do people know if they have hepatitis B?

The only way for people to know if they have hepatitis B is to have a **blood test for hepatitis B** (it is different from common blood tests). All GPs can order the test, and it should include tests for **hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg), hepatitis B surface antibody (HBsAb), and hepatitis B core antibody (HBcAb)**.

The table below can help people understand their results.

Do I have hepatitis B?	Test results		What is my status?	What to do next?
No	HBsAg	Negative	No protection - susceptible to hepatitis B virus	Consider a hepatitis B vaccination to get protected
	HBsAb	Negative (or <10 IU/L)		
	HBcAb	Negative		
	HBsAg	Negative	Protected because of hepatitis B vaccination (immune)	Nothing
	HBsAb	Positive (or >10 IU/L)		
	HBcAb	Negative		
	HBsAg	Negative	Protected because of past hepatitis B infection (immune)	Nothing
	HBsAb	Positive (or >10 IU/L)		
	HBcAb	Positive		
Yes	HBsAg	Positive	Hepatitis B	Further tests and life-long regular check-ups if chronic
	HBsAb	Negative (or <10 IU/L)		
	HBcAb	Positive		

HBsAg means Hepatitis B Surface Antigen (also written as HepBsAg). If it is positive, it means you have hepatitis B.

HBsAb means Hepatitis B Surface Antibody (also written as HepBsAb or anti-HBs). If it is positive, it means you are immune to or protected against hepatitis B.

HBcAb means Hepatitis B Core (Total) Antibody (also written as HepBcAb or anti-HBc). If it is positive, it means you had hepatitis B in the past or currently have hepatitis B.

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

Most people are not required to be tested for hepatitis B, except the following groups:

Permanent and provisional visa applicants:

- are aged 15 or over and intend to work as or study to be a doctor, dentist, nurse or paramedic
- are aged 15 or over and apply for an onshore protection type visa
- are pregnant and plan to have the baby in Australia
- are a child for adoption or a child in the care of an Australian state or territory government welfare authority

Temporary visa applicants:

- intend to work as or study to be a doctor, dentist, nurse or paramedic
- are pregnant and intend to have the baby in Australia

You can find update and detailed information at

<https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/help-support/meeting-our-requirements/health>

People should consider having a hepatitis B test after arriving in Australia if they are not part of the above groups.

How does hepatitis B affect people?

About 1 in every 4 people (25%) with chronic hepatitis B can develop **serious** liver disease, including liver failure (liver stops working), liver cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), or liver cancer. These can be prevented if people have regular checkups and take treatment if required.

Is there treatment for hepatitis B?

Yes, there are treatments for chronic hepatitis B that reduce the amount of virus in the body, and help prevent liver damage, cirrhosis and liver cancer. However, this is not a cure. **Currently, people need to take the treatment every day for life.** Not all people with chronic hepatitis B need treatment, but all people with chronic hepatitis B need regular check-ups by their doctor for their whole life (*please refer to the B Healthy – My guide to chronic Hepatitis B booklet for more details*). Chronic hepatitis B can flare up (suddenly change) and cause liver damage at any time without a person feeling unwell. Hepatitis B may not cause problems for many years, but for some people, liver damage may develop quickly. Check-ups are the only way to find out if any liver damage has occurred and whether treatment is needed. This helps to prevent liver cirrhosis, liver cancer and liver failure.

You may not need treatment for acute hepatitis B because it is only a short-term infection.

GPs with specific hepatitis B training and specialists can provide treatment for chronic hepatitis B. You can find the list of these GPs at www.ashm.org.au

How can people protect themselves from hepatitis B?

There is a vaccine for hepatitis B. Vaccination is the best way to prevent people from getting hepatitis B. In Queensland, some people can get the hepatitis B vaccine for free, for example:

- Infants
- People living with a person who has hepatitis B, such as family members or housemates
- Migrants from hepatitis B endemic countries who have a Medicare card (if not already immune to hepatitis B or not previously vaccinated)
- Persons with chronic liver disease and/or hepatitis C
- Sexual contacts of persons with hepatitis B

Please go to www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/diseases-infection/immunisation/schedule for the most up to date list.

For adults, the hepatitis B vaccine involves 3 injections over 6 months. For infants, there are 4 injections over 6 months and the first injection is given at birth. It is important to complete all the injections for the vaccine to work. Most people do not need any more injections (booster) after completing all injections.

Before being vaccinated, people should ask their doctor to check if they need the vaccine. If already vaccinated for hepatitis B, or have had hepatitis B in the past, they already have immunity (protection) and do not need the hepatitis B vaccine.

What will happen if a pregnant woman has hepatitis B?

As soon as a woman knows she is pregnant, she should see a doctor for advice. Some women with a high level of hepatitis B virus (viral load) in the blood may need medication in the last few months of pregnancy to reduce the risk of passing the virus to the baby. The baby should also get the first dose of the hepatitis B vaccine and hepatitis B immune globulin (HBIG) within 12 hours of the baby being born, then 3 more doses of hepatitis B vaccine at 2, 4 and 6 months. By doing so, the chance of the baby getting hepatitis B can be greatly reduced to less than 5%. The child can be tested for hepatitis B at 9 - 12 months of age to check if he/she is infected and if the hepatitis B vaccine has worked. Mothers with hepatitis B can breastfeed safely.

Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is caused by the hepatitis C virus (HCV). People coming to Australia from another country may have been infected with hepatitis C in their home country but are not aware of it. Like hepatitis B, hepatitis C can be an acute or chronic infection. Unlike hepatitis B, the chance of people developing chronic hepatitis C does not depend on the age of infection. About 3 out of every 4 people (75%) infected by the hepatitis C virus will have a chronic infection.

How do people get hepatitis C?

People can get hepatitis C through **contact with blood** that is infected with the hepatitis C virus, such as:

- Use of unsterile medical equipment (e.g. medical or dental procedures, piercing or tattooing)
- Blood transfusions and blood products
- Cultural practices and traditional treatments that involve cutting or penetrating the skin, if the equipment or tools used are not sterilised
- Sharing personal care items that may have blood on them (for example, razors and toothbrushes)
- Sharing injecting drug use equipment including tourniquets, spoons and water

Pregnant women can pass on the virus to her baby during birth. This is not common and less than 5% of babies born to mothers with hepatitis C will be infected.

People cannot get hepatitis C through social contacts such as shaking hands, sharing food and drinks, hugging, breast feeding, kissing, using public toilets or swimming pools, and insect bites.



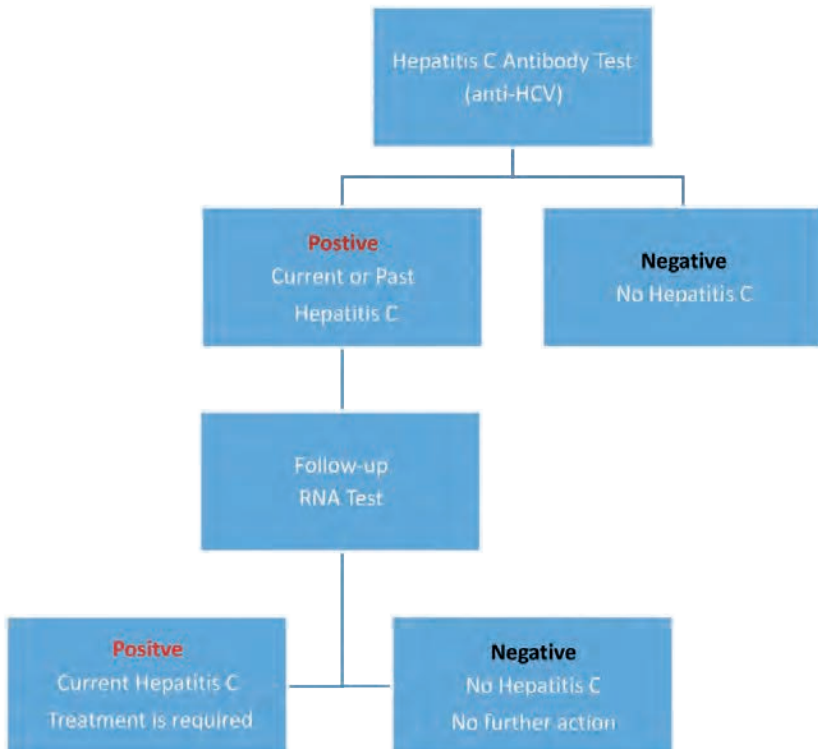
What are the symptoms of hepatitis C?

Most people with hepatitis C often have no symptoms, but some people may experience symptoms similar to hepatitis A or hepatitis B.

How do people know if they have hepatitis C?

The only way for people to know if they have hepatitis C is to have a **blood test for hepatitis C** (it is different from common blood tests). All GPs can order the test.

Firstly, the test looks for **hepatitis C antibodies** in the blood. If the antibody test is negative, the person doesn't have hepatitis C. If positive, it means that the person either currently has hepatitis C or had hepatitis C in the past. A follow-up test called a **hepatitis C RNA** test is needed to find out whether the person still has hepatitis C or not. If the RNA test is negative, it means the person does not have hepatitis C. If the RNA test is **positive**, it means the person currently has hepatitis C and will **require treatment**.



People with chronic hepatitis C can develop serious liver disease, such as cirrhosis and liver cancer. It is important for people to be tested to find out if they have chronic hepatitis C. If a person has just become infected (acute), another HCV RNA test will be needed at least 3 months later, to see if the virus still exists.

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

Most people are not required to be tested for hepatitis C, except the following groups:

Permanent and provisional visa applicants:

- are aged 15 or over and intend to work as or study to be a doctor, dentist, nurse or paramedic in Australia
- are aged 15 or over and apply for an onshore protection type visa

Temporary visa applicants who intend to work as or study to be a doctor, dentist, nurse or paramedic in Australia

Please find updated and detailed information at

<https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/help-support/meeting-our-requirements/health>

How does hepatitis C affect people?

Without treatment, chronic hepatitis C can damage the liver over the years and some people may develop serious liver disease, including liver failure, cirrhosis and liver cancer.



Is there treatment for hepatitis C?

Yes, there are very effective treatments for hepatitis C. After completing 8 or 12 weeks of treatment, over 95% of people with chronic hepatitis C will be **cured** (no hepatitis C). The treatments have very few side effects such as tiredness or headache. GPs and specialists can provide treatment for hepatitis C. Generally, if you have a Medicare card, the treatment costs less than \$125, with a concession card less than \$20. If you don't have a Medicare card, you can access cheaper hepatitis C medication at www.fixhepC.com. **People who have been cured can become infected with hepatitis C virus again if they don't protect themselves from the virus. Please see our Hepatitis C Factsheet for details (www.eccq.com.au/health).**

How can people protect themselves from hepatitis C?

There is **NO** vaccine for hepatitis C. It is very important to prevent it by avoiding contact with blood:

- Do not share anything that may have been exposed to blood (such as razors or injecting drug equipment)
- Avoid 'backyard' practices (at home or not in a licenced place) that involve skin penetration or blood contact, such as tattooing, body or ear piercing and cosmetic procedures
- Cover cuts, scratches and scrapes with dressings or a bandage
- Wear gloves while cleaning up any blood
- Be careful when visiting a hospital, doctor or dentist in another country. Ask whether they sterilise their equipment or use new equipment

What will happen if a pregnant woman has hepatitis C?

The risk of a pregnant woman passing hepatitis C to her child is very low (less than 5%). Mothers with hepatitis C can breastfeed; however, if a woman's nipples are cracked, she should try not to breastfeed until they heal. Women should see their doctor for advice as soon as they know they are pregnant.

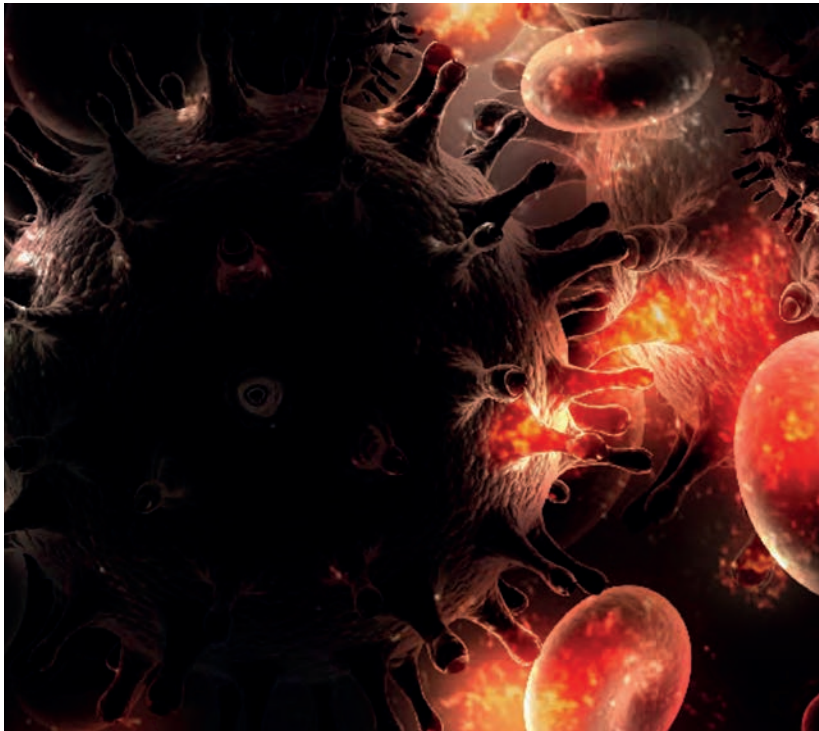
HIV

HIV

Thousands of people in Australia are infected with HIV and anyone can get HIV, including people from overseas or their partner from overseas. People need to protect themselves from getting HIV in Australia or travelling overseas.

What is HIV/AIDS?

HIV stands for **H**uman **I**mmunodeficiency **V**irus. It is the virus that can cause **AIDS** (**A**cquired **I**mmunodeficiency **S**yndrome). AIDS is the late stage of the HIV infection. Not all people with HIV develop AIDS. If people are tested and treated early for HIV they will not progress to AIDS.



How do people get HIV?

People can get HIV through contact with infected body fluids, such as blood, semen, vaginal fluid and breast milk. People can only get HIV if infected body fluids get into their body from:

Sex: HIV can be spread through having vaginal or anal sex with someone who has HIV. This is a common way to transmit HIV in many countries. People infected with an STI have a higher risk of becoming infected with HIV. People who have both HIV and an STI are more likely to transmit HIV to their sexual partner(s).

Mother-to-child: A mother with HIV can pass it on to her child during pregnancy, at birth or through breastfeeding.

Blood and blood products:

- People in some countries may get HIV from blood transfusions and blood products such as plasma, however, they are safer in Australia. Unlike Australia, donated blood and blood products in some countries may not be tested and could be infected with HIV or other viruses, such as hepatitis B and C.
- In some countries, medical equipment including needles and syringes may be cleaned but not sterilised (sterilisation kills bacteria and viruses after use). Therefore, HIV can be spread to other people when the same instrument is used again. However, medical equipment used in Australia is safer due to strict health policies and higher standards.
- Some cultural practices and traditional treatments that involve cutting or piercing the skin may put people at risk of getting HIV (or hepatitis B and hepatitis C) if the equipment or tools used are re-used and not sterilised properly.
- Body or ear piercing and tattooing, where the instruments used are not sterile.
- Sharing needles and syringes for injecting drugs is a common way to transmit HIV in some countries.

People **cannot get** HIV through:

- Kissing
- Shaking hands
- Hugging
- Sharing food and drinks
- Using swimming pools and toilet seats
- Mosquitoes
- Sweat
- Tears
- Saliva
- Urine



What are the symptoms of HIV?

In the first 10 weeks after being infected with HIV, many people experience flu-like symptoms, such as:

- Fever
- Swollen lymph nodes (lymph glands)
- Swollen tonsils (tonsillitis)
- Sore throat
- Joint and muscle aches
- Diarrhoea
- Rash

These symptoms will then disappear quickly and infected people will not show any symptoms for some years.

How do people know if they have HIV?

Many people with HIV look and feel healthy. The only way for people to know if they have HIV is to have a **test for HIV**. All GPs can order the test. If people have been infected in the last 2 weeks to 3 months, the blood test may not be able to tell whether they have the infection or not, and they will need to have a second test. This period of time is called the window period. While waiting for the results of their HIV test, they should use condoms during sex and avoid blood contact. People will get a much better health outcome if they are tested and treated early. If a person's test result is **positive**, it means this person has HIV.



Are people tested for HIV before they come to Australia?

People often think that they were tested for HIV before they came to Australia but many people are not required to be tested for HIV. Only the following groups are required to get tested:

Permanent and provisional visa applicants:

- are aged 15 or over
- are a child for adoption or a child in the care of an Australian state or territory government welfare authority

Temporary visa applicants who intend to work as (or study to be) a doctor, dentist, nurse or paramedic

Please find update and detailed information at <https://immi.homeaffairs.gov.au/help-support/meeting-our-requirements/health>

People should consider having an HIV test if they have not been tested already.

How does HIV affect people?

People with HIV might look and feel healthy for many years after they have been infected. However, **without treatment**, HIV can slowly destroy the immune (the body's defence) system over the years and later will progress to AIDS, making it easier to get serious infections and other diseases that healthy people do not normally get. People can die from these AIDS-related infections and diseases.

Is there treatment for HIV?

Yes, there are very effective antiretroviral drugs or ART to control HIV and prevent AIDS. It is not a cure. People diagnosed with HIV should start HIV treatment as soon as possible. Currently, people are required to continue taking medication every day for life. Only GPs with HIV training and specialists can provide the HIV treatment. You can find a GP with training in HIV at www.ashm.org.au

People with HIV can have a healthier life if they take HIV medications, as required. Early testing and treatment are important to make treatments effective.

With effective treatment, the amount of HIV in the body can be reduced to a very low level, and unable to be found in the blood test, this is called “Undetectable”. It doesn’t mean the person is free of HIV, the continued treatment is required to keep the virus low. A person with undetectable HIV cannot pass the HIV to other people by sexual contact (Undetectable=Untransmissible or U=U). Thus treatment can prevent HIV.

How can people protect themselves from HIV?

There is **no** vaccine for HIV. Therefore it is very important to take the following measures to protect yourself and others:

- Use condoms: currently condoms are still the best protection to prevent sexually transmitted HIV, STIs and pregnancy.
- Avoid direct blood contact: please see details described previously under “How can people protect themselves from hepatitis C?”.
- Take HIV prevention medication
 - Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP): is for people who do not have HIV to prevent an HIV infection. PrEP is not a vaccine. It only works when you take it every day. If you stop taking PrEP, you will not be protected. Any GP can prescribe PrEP. If you do not have a Medicare card, you can order PrEP online at: www.greencrosspharmacy.online. Because PrEP is an HIV medicine, there are some side effects when you take it. You cannot take another person’s HIV medicine to protect you from getting HIV.
 - Post-Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP): is a 4-week course of anti-HIV medication that may prevent HIV infection after exposure. To be most effective, PEP should be started within 24 hours of possible exposure but it can be taken up to within 72 hours. Doctors at Sexual Health Clinics, Emergency Departments in major hospitals and GPs with HIV training (as described previously) can prescribe PEP.

What will happen if a woman is pregnant and has HIV?

A woman with HIV can have an HIV free (or HIV negative) baby. There are many ways to greatly reduce the risk of a baby being infected with HIV to less than 1%. If a woman with HIV is planning to have a baby or has just become pregnant they should see a doctor to get advice.



Undetectable = Untransmissible

U = U

STIs

STIs

An STI (Sexually Transmissible Infection) is a name for disease that can be passed from one person to another by sexual contact including vaginal sex (penis in vagina), anal sex (penis in anus) and oral sex (mouth to genitals/anus). There are many different STIs. Some STIs are caused by viruses, some by bacteria and some by parasites.

Some STIs can cause serious long-term health problems, including infertility (when a person cannot have a baby). This can affect both men and women and may occasionally cause death. STIs can also increase the risk of transmitting and getting HIV. Therefore, it is important that STIs are diagnosed and treated early. The common STIs in Australia include bacterial infections such as chlamydia, gonorrhoea, and syphilis as well as viral infections such as genital herpes and genital warts. HIV and hepatitis B can be transmitted by sexual contact and they have been discussed separately in this booklet.

What are the symptoms of STIs?

Most people who have an STI do not have any symptoms. However, some people may experience one or more of the following symptoms:

- Blisters, lumps, sores, a rash or a change in the skin on the genitals (penis, testicles, vagina or anus)
- Pain in the testicles (males)
- Lower belly pain, pain during or just after sex, or bleeding between periods (females)
- Unusual discharge or bleeding from the penis, vagina, or anus
- Pain or difficulty passing urine

How do people know if they have an STI?

Many STIs have no symptoms, the only way to know is to have a sexual health check. All people who are sexually active should have sexual health checks.

It is recommended that people should have a sexual health check if they:

- think they may have an STI
- had sex without a condom, or the condom broke or fell off
- they or their partner have had more than one sexual partner
- start or finish a sexual relationship
- have been sexually assaulted

Are people tested for STIs before they come to Australia?

Most people are not required to be tested for STIs before coming to Australia.

People need to test for syphilis if they:

- are aged 15 or over and applying for an onshore protection type visa
- are aged 15 or over and applying for a refugee type visa

How can people with an STI protect others?

People who are being treated for an STI should avoid having sex during treatment as the infection may be transmitted to their sexual partner(s). People with an STI should talk to their doctor or nurse about contacting any past or current sexual partner(s). If sexual partner(s) are also infected, they may get sick, pass the infection on to other people, or re-infect their current sexual partner.

How can people protect themselves from STIs?

- Condoms are the best protection against STIs. Condoms can not only prevent STIs but also HIV and pregnancy. You should use condoms correctly and consistently:
 - Choose and use the right size (width) condom – small (45mm-51mm), regular (52mm -56mm) or large (56mm-60mm). ECCQ has a sample pack of condoms available for free. If you like to order please go to www.eccq.com.au/health or email health@eccq.com.au
 - Condoms need to be kept in a cool place because they can be damaged by heat
 - Check the expiry date before using a condom
 - Use water based lubricant with condoms to prevent condoms from breaking
 - Do not use two or more condoms at the same time
 - Do not re-use condoms
- Condoms and water-based lubricant can be bought from supermarkets, pharmacists, and convenience stores.
- Reducing the number of sexual partners.
- Having a sexual health check if they have had sex while travelling in another country.

- Having a sexual health check when they have finished a relationship, before they start a new one or whenever they have had unsafe sex.
- Avoid having sex with a person if they have a lump, rash or sore on their genitals. Suggest that they have a sexual health check. But remember, most people with a STI will not show any symptoms.
- Drinking alcohol in moderation. Drinking alcohol or taking drugs can make it difficult to make good decisions about having safe sex.
- Do not wash out vagina with water or antiseptic solution after sex (this is called douching). Washing out the vagina does not protect against STIs, and instead, it can make it easier to be infected. Some traditional remedies used for vaginal infections can also make it easier to get an STI.
- There is a vaccine available for genital warts (HPV vaccine), but not for other STIs yet.

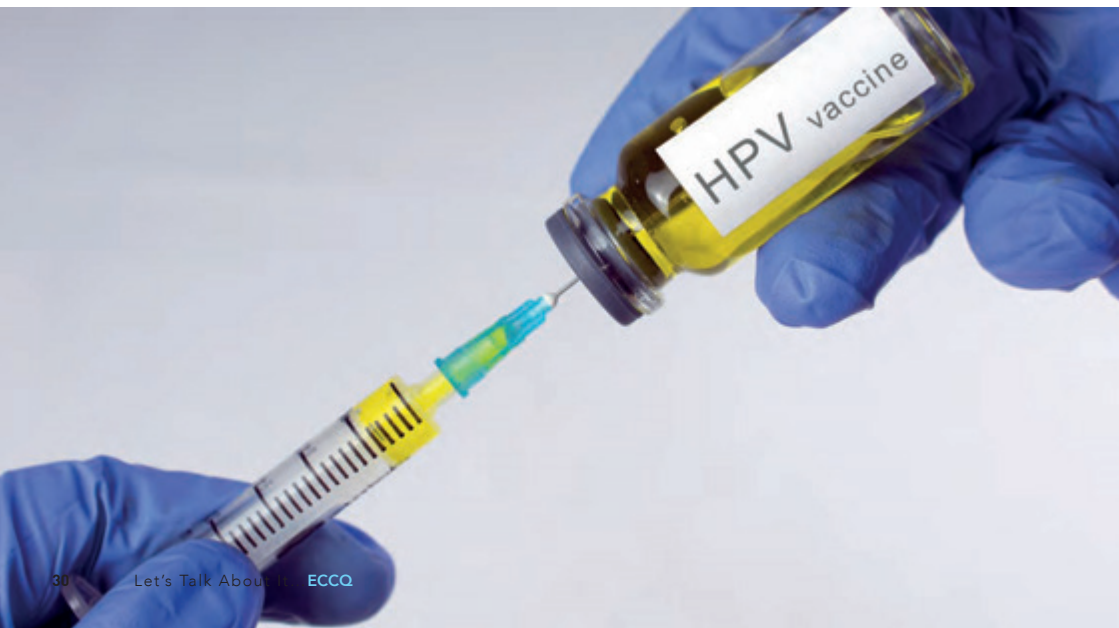


Human Papilloma Virus (HPV) vaccine

There are more than 100 different types of HPV. Some types of HPV cause genital warts and some of these types of HPV can cause cancers of the cervix, anus, vulva, vagina, penis and throat. There is a vaccine that can protect against the most common types of HPV that cause HPV related cancers and genital warts. The HPV vaccine is very effective and safe. For those aged 14 and under, the vaccine is given as two injections 6 to 12 months apart. In Australia, girls and boys aged 12-13 can receive the HPV vaccine in school, free of charge, as part of the National HPV Vaccination Program. People aged 15 or older will need 3 injections at 0, 2, 6 month intervals and the vaccines are not for people over 26 years old. The HPV vaccine is most effective if given before people become sexually active. However, the HPV vaccine does not protect against all of the HPV types. All women between the ages of 25 and 74 years should have a Cervical Screening Test every 5 years. The Cervical Screening Test looks for HPV.

What will happen if a pregnant woman has an STI?

In Australia, pregnant women are routinely tested for Chlamydia, Syphilis, HIV and Hepatitis B at the start of their pregnancy and sometimes more than once during the pregnancy if they are at high risk. This is because STIs like syphilis can be very dangerous for babies. Treatment and careful planning for the birth can reduce the risk of the baby being infected.



Common STIs in Australia – Summary

STI name	Transmission	Test	Treatment	Prevention	Consequences without testing and treatment
Chlamydia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> vaginal, oral and anal sex pregnant women can transmit to child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> urine tests swab taken from affected area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> caused by bacteria, therefore, can be cured with the correct antibiotic treatment can be reinfected after cure 	<p>use condoms</p> <p>no vaccine</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> infertility (difficulty having baby) in men and women pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) and ectopic pregnancies (baby starts to develop in wrong place) in women
Gonorrhoea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> vaginal, oral and anal sex pregnant women can transmit to child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> urine tests swab taken from affected area 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> caused by bacteria, therefore, can be cured with the correct antibiotic treatment can be reinfected after cure increased drug resistance problem 	<p>use condoms</p> <p>no vaccine</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> infertility (difficulty having a baby) in men and women pelvic inflammatory disease (PID) and ectopic pregnancies (baby starts to develop in wrong place) in women
Syphilis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> direct contact with sores/lesions from an infected person pregnant women can transmit to child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> blood test swab taken from sore/lesion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> caused by bacteria, therefore, can be cured with the correct antibiotic can be reinfected after cure 	<p>use condoms</p> <p>no vaccine</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> damage to vital organs, such as the brain or heart miscarriage, foetal death or serious problems for babies
Genital Herpes (small sores on the skin)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> close body contact (usually through sexual contact) pregnant women can transmit to child 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> swab taken from open sore 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> caused by viruses and cannot be cured treatments such as injection, oral medication, or applying cream onto affected area can help with symptoms (treatment must be finished even after symptoms disappear) 	<p>use condoms</p> <p>(may not prevent transmission if affected areas are not covered)</p> <p>no vaccine</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> painful sores can spread to other parts of the body
Genital Warts (painless, raised bumps on skin around genitals)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> close body contact (usually through sexual contact) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> physical examination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> caused by viruses and cannot be cured warts can be removed by freezing, cutting or laser (burning), or by applying a cream 	<p>vaccine is available (HPV vaccine)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> bumps can become big and uncomfortable, painful or very itchy cancer of cervix, penis, anus or throat (depending on site of infection)

Frequently asked questions

What are viruses and bacteria?

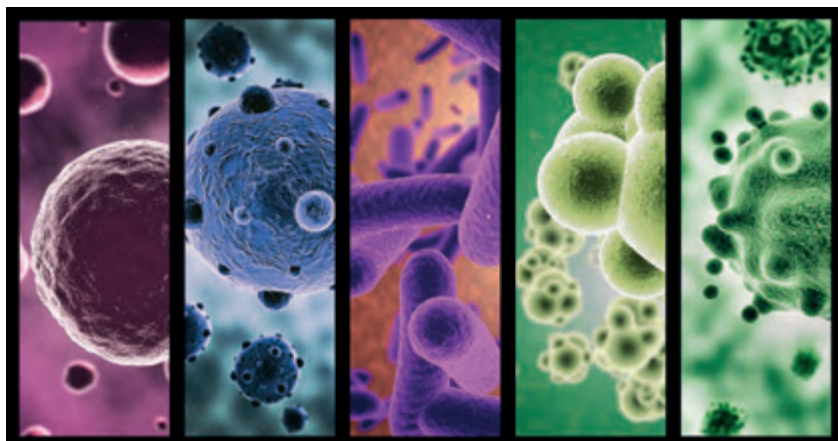
Viruses and bacteria are very small germs that can cause infectious diseases. There are many different viruses and bacteria that can cause different diseases. They cannot be seen with the naked eye but they can be passed between people through different ways such as blood, body fluids, food, drinks, urine, air and so on.

What are antigens and antibodies?

Antigens are parts of viruses or bacteria. Antibodies are produced by the body's immune system to fight against or destroy viruses or bacteria. Antigens and antibodies exist in the blood therefore a blood test can find out if a person has a certain disease, or has had the disease in the past by looking for the antigen for that particular virus or bacteria or the antibody response.

What is the difference between a vaccine, treatment and cure?

A vaccine is a product that can prevent people from getting a disease. It is for people who have never been infected. When people already have a disease, treatment can control the disease so it does not get worse. Treatment can sometimes cure a disease/infection so the person does not have the disease anymore such as for hepatitis C, chlamydia, gonorrhoea and syphilis. However, people can get these diseases again (re-infection).



What is a sexual health check?

A sexual health check is an appointment with a health provider to talk about your sexual health and possibly to do testing for STIs or other viruses like HIV or hepatitis. In Queensland, you can get a sexual health check from your doctor, or at a sexual health clinic, or through family planning services such as True Relationships and Reproductive Health. If you do not have any symptoms and you are just wanting a check-up, your doctor is a good choice, as long as they are someone you feel comfortable with. If you have more complex sexual health concerns, or want to see someone who is more specialised, then a sexual health clinic or place like True might be better for you. Either way, you should call and make an appointment first. For a list of sexual health clinics in Queensland, please see the following website: <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/sex-health/services>

What does a sexual health check involve?

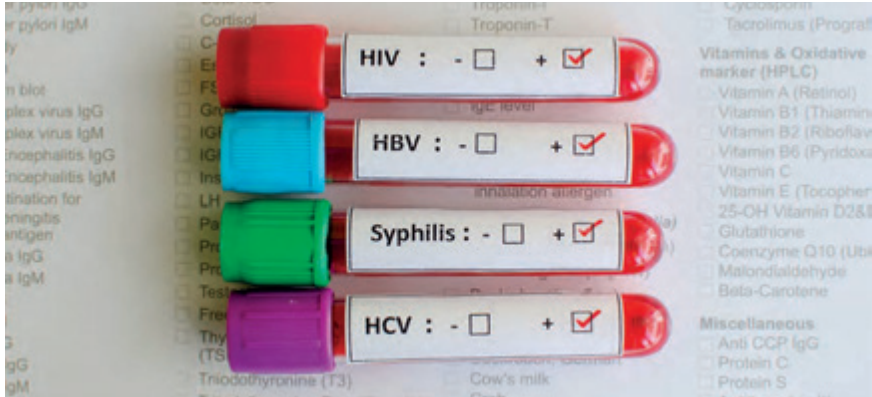
A sexual health check may involve answering questions about current and previous sexual activity, including the number and gender of sexual partner(s), the type of sex and any past illnesses. Some questions can be embarrassing or difficult to answer but it is important to tell the truth. This helps the doctor to do the right tests and make the right diagnosis. People should not feel ashamed, try to hide, or lie about having an infection or symptoms.

With your permission, the doctor may do a physical examination and take samples of blood, urine or discharge to test for common STIs, HIV, and hepatitis. People can ask to see a male or female doctor or nurse.



Can people have more than one infection at a time?

Yes. People who are infected with more than one infection at one time have a “co-infection”. For example, people may have hepatitis B and HIV at the same time or hepatitis B and hepatitis C or hepatitis B and syphilis.



What if people cannot speak English?

People who have difficulty speaking or understanding English can and should have a qualified interpreter there during their visit to the doctor or Sexual Health Clinic or assisting over the telephone, for free. People who need an interpreter need to tell the doctor when they make the appointment. They will also need to say which language and the dialect they speak. This will help the doctor book the correct interpreter. People can ask to have a male or female interpreter. Interpreters should not reveal any personal information about them to other people. Family members should not be used as interpreters.



Can people get hepatitis, HIV and STIs when they travel to their home country?

Yes. In some countries people can be exposed to infection risks that are not present or are less common in Australia. This means that people may become infected while visiting other countries, including their home country.

People should be aware of how hepatitis, HIV and STIs are transmitted. They can then take action to protect themselves from infection while travelling overseas.

People should take condoms with them and use them for sexual activities while they are away. They should also avoid practices involving blood; never share grooming products like razors or toothbrushes; drink boiled or bottled water and be careful about how their food is prepared. If people are having medical or dental treatments or getting a tattoo or body piercing, they should ask for new or sterile instruments to be used.

Do people have to tell others that they have hepatitis, HIV and/or STIs?

In Queensland, people do not have to tell other people if they have any of these infections, except in a few circumstances (www.halc.org.au). If there is a possibility that a person has become infected with hepatitis, HIV or an STI from another person, this person needs to know and to be tested. If it is difficult or not possible for a person to tell their past contacts, a doctor or nurse can help them, and they will not give any information about the person. This process is called contact tracing. Contact tracing helps to stop the spread of infections and ensures that all people who have an infection can get treatment. The staff at Sexual Health Clinics are trained to provide a helpful and confidential service.

People need to take special care not to pass on hepatitis, HIV, or STIs to other people, by using a condom and being careful not to let anyone come into contact with their blood.



Does Australia treat people with hepatitis, HIV, and STIs unfairly?

In Australia, it is against the law to treat people unfairly because they have hepatitis, HIV, an STI, or any other medical condition. People who have an infection can receive support from various organisations.

People who have these infections should get the same quality of services and the same opportunities as everyone else. Having hepatitis, HIV, an STI should not influence their employment, education, Centrelink payments or current visa status. People who experience discrimination should contact the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland at <https://www.adcq.qld.gov.au>

Further Information

Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland (ECCQ)

Website: www.eccq.com.au/health

Phone: 07 32551540

Email: health@eccq.com.au

Queensland Health

Website: www.health.qld.gov.au/sexhealth

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Ethnic Communities
Council of Queensland