



B Healthy

English



My guide to Chronic Hepatitis B

© Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland (ECCQ)

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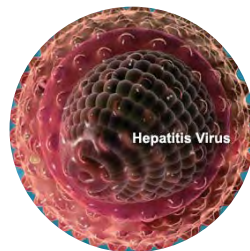
What is hepatitis?

Hepatitis affects the liver and it means inflammation of the liver.

Hepatitis can be caused by:

- Too much alcohol
- Some drugs/chemicals
- Viruses

Hepatitis caused by alcohol or drugs/chemicals cannot be passed from one person to another, but hepatitis caused by viruses (called viral hepatitis) can be. The common types of viral hepatitis are hepatitis A, hepatitis B and hepatitis C. Hepatitis B and C can be lifelong infections, although hepatitis C can now be cured in nearly all cases.



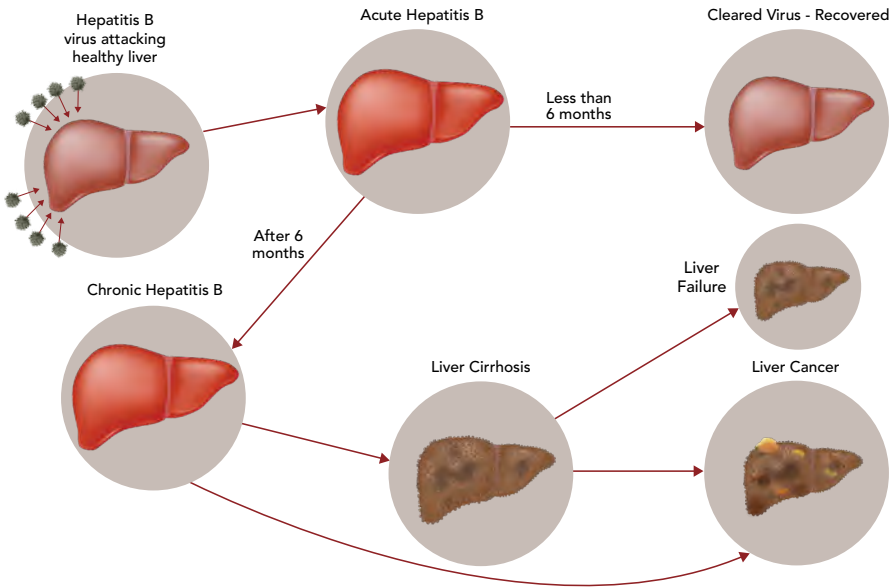


What is the liver?

The liver is the largest organ inside the body. It has many functions. For example, it removes harmful substances such as toxins and chemicals, stores vitamins, helps digestion, and processes food into nutrients.

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is liver inflammation caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). Hepatitis B can be a short-term illness (acute hepatitis B) or a long-term infection (chronic hepatitis B).



What is acute hepatitis B?

Acute hepatitis B is when people are infected with the hepatitis B virus for the first time and the infection lasts less than six months.

Some people can clear the hepatitis B virus completely after an acute infection and totally recover from it. They are then **immune** to (have protection from) the hepatitis B virus, which means they will not get hepatitis B again.

What is chronic hepatitis B (CHB)?

After six months of acute infection, some people cannot clear the hepatitis B virus and they will have hepatitis B for life. This is called chronic hepatitis B. Without regular monitoring and appropriate management, after many years of infection, some people can develop a serious liver disease, including liver cirrhosis (build-up of scar tissue in the liver), liver failure (liver stops working), or liver cancer.

How likely are people to develop chronic Hepatitis B?

The chance of people developing chronic hepatitis B after an acute infection mainly depends on the age at which they are infected: about 80-90% of infants infected with the hepatitis B virus will develop chronic hepatitis B; 30-50% of children under 6 years infected with the hepatitis B virus will develop chronic hepatitis B, but less than 5% of adults infected with the hepatitis B virus will develop chronic hepatitis B.

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



How common is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is common in many countries and about 2 billion people have been infected in the world. In Australia, it is estimated that more than 200,000 people are chronically infected, and many of them are from the Asia-Pacific region, Africa and the Middle Eastern countries. It is important for you to get a hepatitis B test if you come from one of these countries.

Are there any symptoms if you are infected with hepatitis B?

Many people do not show symptoms for many years after the infection. Approximately 40% of people with hepatitis B in Australia do not know they have it; however, some people may have one or more of the following symptoms:

- Abdominal pains
- Nausea or vomiting

- Tiredness (fatigue), depression and irritability
- Loss of appetite (not feeling hungry) and weight loss
- Aches and pains
- Fever
- Jaundice (yellow skin, yellow eyes)

How do people get hepatitis B?

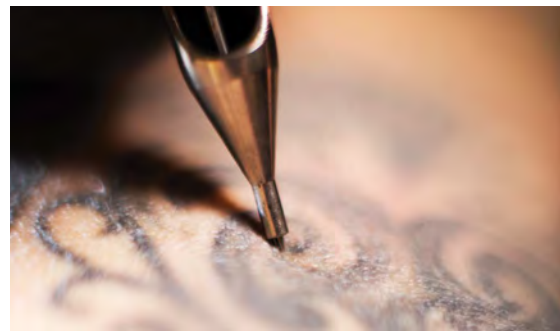
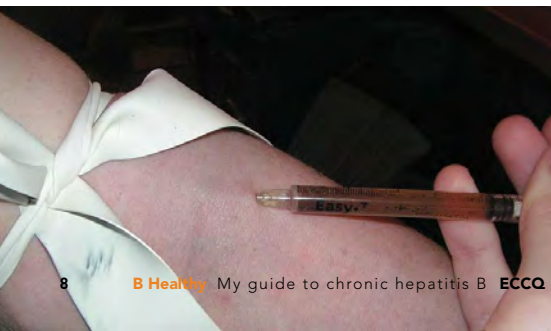
People *can* get hepatitis B through:

- **Mother-to-baby transmission** – a pregnant woman with hepatitis B can pass the hepatitis B virus to her baby around birth. In many countries it is a common way to get hepatitis B.
- **Blood transmission** – there are many ways people can get hepatitis B through blood contact, even when the blood is invisible, for example:
 - Unsterile medical equipment – in some countries, medical equipment, including needles and syringes, may be cleaned but not sterilised (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.
 - Sharing personal care items such as toothbrushes, razors and nail clippers.
 - Body or ear piercings and tattooing (including eyebrow and make-up tattooing) – if the equipment is not sterile.



- Cultural practices and traditional treatments – some cultural practices and traditional treatments that involve cutting or piercing the skin may put people at risk of getting hepatitis B if the equipment or tools used are not sterilised properly. For example, scarification, female genital mutilation (It is illegal in Australia), tattooing, acupuncture and hijamah (blood letting).
- Child-to-child and close family contact: infected people may pass hepatitis B to others through contact with open sores, cuts or wounds, as well as through shared objects such as toothbrushes and razors.
- Blood transfusion or blood products – people in some countries may get hepatitis B from blood transfusions or blood products because they are not tested for the hepatitis B virus. In Australia, all blood and blood products are carefully tested to make sure that they are safe.
- Sharing injecting drug equipment.

Sexual transmission - hepatitis B can be spread through unprotected sex (sex without using a condom). However, due to the age of people engaging in sexual activity (generally older), the chance of an acute hepatitis B developing into a chronic infection is small.



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

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



How do I know if I have hepatitis B?

You cannot tell if someone has hepatitis B just by looking at them. The only way to know if you have hepatitis B is to have a hepatitis B blood test. All GPs (medical doctors who are your first contact point for all daily health matters) can provide the test. Based on the test results, your doctor should be able to tell you:

- If you have an acute hepatitis B infection.
- If you have a chronic hepatitis B infection.
- If you are immune to hepatitis B, either due to a hepatitis B infection in the past (had acute hepatitis B before and cleared virus naturally) or from the hepatitis B vaccine. If you are immune you will not get hepatitis B again.
- If you are susceptible to a hepatitis B infection. If so, you may consider getting the hepatitis B vaccine.

If anyone in your family has hepatitis B, other family members should have a hepatitis B test. If you have hepatitis B, you also need to have hepatitis C, hepatitis D, and HIV tests, because they share the same transmission route – blood. You also need to get a hepatitis A vaccine if you are not already protected.





How to prevent hepatitis B?

The hepatitis B vaccine 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
- Those with household or other close (household-like) contact with people with hepatitis B
- Migrants with a Medicare card from a country where hepatitis B is common (if not already immune to hepatitis B or not previously vaccinated)
- People with chronic liver disease and/or hepatitis C
- Sexual contact with people with hepatitis B

Please go to www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/diseases-infection/immunisation/schedule/default.asp to find the most up-to-date full 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. Most people do not need any further injections.

The hepatitis B vaccine is not usually recommended for pregnant or breastfeeding women. However it can be used in some circumstances – talk to your doctor.

Other ways to protect you from hepatitis B:

- Avoid blood
 - Do not share toothbrushes, razors, nail files, earrings, clippers, syringes, needles or anything that may have come into contact with blood
 - Clean up blood/bodily fluid spills with household bleach and wear gloves (do not put bleach on your skin)
 - Use a band aid to cover your wound
- Use condoms for sex



Part 2

Monitoring and Treatment

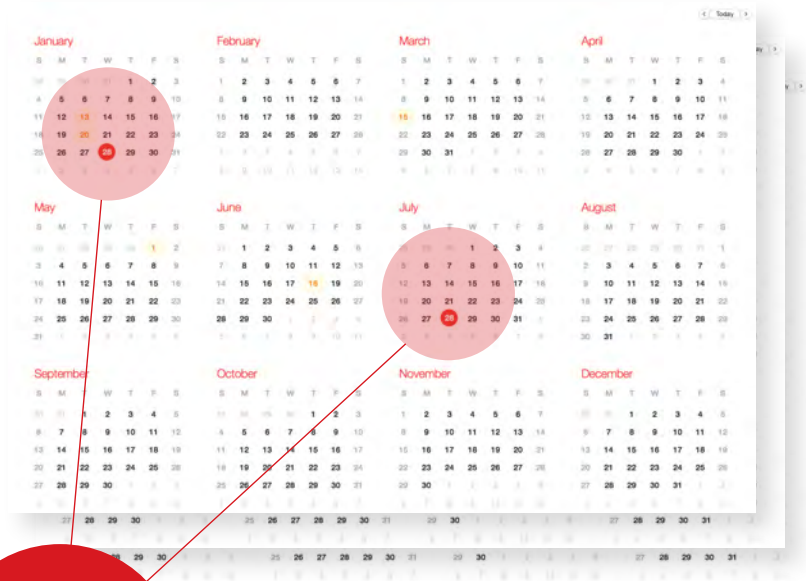
Monitoring

What is monitoring?

Monitoring is ongoing check-ups with your doctor to check the health of your liver.

Who should have regular monitoring?

Everyone with chronic hepatitis B should be regularly monitored for life.



Every 6 months
"liver check-up
appointment"

Why do I need regular monitoring?

Chronic hepatitis B can flare up (suddenly change) and cause liver damage at any time without you feeling unwell. For some people, hepatitis B may not cause problems for many years, but for some, 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 can prevent liver cirrhosis, liver cancer or liver failure.

How long and how often do I need to be monitored?

If you have chronic hepatitis B, you will require monitoring for your whole life. Most people need to have check-ups every 6 months, some every 3 months, and some every 12 months. How often you need to have check-ups depends on a number of factors, such as your infection status, amount of liver damage, whether you are on treatment, and whether you have any co-infections or other health issues.

Where should I go for regular check-ups?

Your GP or specialist can monitor your hepatitis B. To see a specialist you need a referral letter from your GP.

What is involved in regular check-ups?

Regular check-ups for your hepatitis B involve several tests. These include:

- Specific blood tests, for example:
 - Hepatitis B e antigen (HBeAg), antibody (anti-HBe) and HBV DNA viral load. These tests are to see if the virus is active and how much of the virus is in your body.
 - Liver function tests - tests for several chemicals in your blood, to see how your liver is functioning and whether you have any active liver damage.

These tests require your doctor to draw more blood than for some other blood tests. This is necessary for your doctor to get good information about your liver. Your doctor will not take more blood than what is required.

- Fibroscan – it is a machine used to find out how much scarring or fibrosis is in the liver. The test takes less than 10 minutes and is painless.
- Ultrasound – please see below

Do I need to have liver cancer screening?

Because chronic hepatitis B can cause liver cancer, if you have chronic hepatitis B and belong to one of the following groups, you need to have liver cancer screening every 6 months:

- African people over 20 years
- Asian men over 40 years
- Asian women over 50 years
- Anyone with cirrhosis
- Anyone with a family history of liver cancer
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over 50 years of age

Liver cancer screening includes:

- Ultrasound – it is a machine that looks for abnormal tissue (or tumour) in your liver. This needs to be done every 6 months.
- Sometimes AFP blood test. AFP is a protein that can go up if there are cancers or liver diseases. This can be checked every 6 months.



Treatment

Is there a cure for chronic hepatitis B?

No, currently there is no cure for chronic hepatitis B. Cure means to clear the virus from the body completely.

Is there treatment for chronic hepatitis B?

Yes. Treatment aims to reduce the amount of virus in your body and prevent liver damage, cirrhosis or liver cancer.

What treatment is available?

Current treatment options for hepatitis B include:

- Anti-viral medicines (Entecavir also called Baraclude, or Tenofovir also called Viread). They are tablets taken every day to reduce the amount of virus in your body and reduce liver damage. There may be some side effects when taking anti-viral medication, such as headache and fatigue, but these side effects are usually very mild.
- Pegylated interferon - an injection which aims to boost your immune system to clear the hepatitis B virus from your body. Pegylated interferon is injected once a week for 48 weeks. Some side effects include flu-like symptoms, tiredness, muscle pain and mood swings.



New medicines continue to be developed for hepatitis B and you can ask your doctor for the latest treatment information.

Treatment is different for each patient. Your doctor (a specialist or a GP trained in hepatitis B treatment) will use the treatment that best suits you.

Please:

- Do not share your medicine with other people. The medicine works for you, but may harm others.
- Take medicines strictly according to your doctor's advice.
- Continue your medication even if you don't feel anything. If you stop taking your medicine your liver may be damaged.
- Continue with your medication even if your virus cannot be detected (is undetectable) after tests. Undetectable means the virus level is so low that it doesn't show in your blood test, but it does not mean you have cleared the virus. If you stop, the hepatitis B virus may flare up again and damage your liver.
- You can only stop taking medication when your doctor tells you to do so.

Can I take herbal or other medicines?

- Talk to your doctor if you have been taking or plan to take any herbal or other medicines. Herbal or other medicines may make your treatment ineffective or make your condition worse. Herbal medicine does not clear the Hepatitis B virus.
- Avoid liver detox.
- Avoid drugs like aspirin (such as Disprin), ibuprofen (such as Nurofen), naproxen (such as Naprosyn), diclofenac (such as Voltaren) and celecoxib (such as Celebrex). Please speak to your doctor about any over-the-counter medication you take or plan to take.
- Use Paracetamol at a reduced dose.



Do I need hepatitis B treatment?

Some people do, but many people do not. However, everyone with chronic hepatitis B needs lifelong monitoring. Your doctor (a specialist or a GP trained in hepatitis B treatment) can tell you if you need medication after examining your regular check-up results. Whether you need medicine is based on a number of factors such as a high HBV DNA level, elevated liver function tests and marked fibrosis (liver scarring).

How do I access treatment if I need it?

If you need hepatitis B treatment, you have to have a doctor's prescription. Prescriptions can be given by a specialist or a GP who has had hepatitis B treatment training.

How much does the treatment cost?

Hepatitis B medicine is heavily subsidised by the government. You only pay a small fee for Hepatitis B medicine if you have a Medicare or Healthcare card.

Part 3

Co-infections

What are co-infections?

If you are infected with more than one virus at one time then you have a co-infection. For example, you may have hepatitis B and HIV at the same time, or hepatitis B and hepatitis C at the same time, or hepatitis B, hepatitis C and HIV at the same time.

How can co-infections impact my care?

Co-infections can make assessment, monitoring, management and treatment of your hepatitis B more complex. You will normally need to see specialists for your care.



Can I die from chronic hepatitis B?

Some people can die from liver cancer, liver failure or liver cirrhosis caused by chronic hepatitis B. To prevent this happening, you must:

- Have your liver monitored regularly.
- Have medication if required.
- Do not drink alcohol and smoke.
- Eat healthy foods such as more vegetables and fruit and less meat, and avoid fatty food. Food is not medicine; it cannot reduce or clear the hepatitis B virus from your body.
- Exercise regularly.

Is my family safe?

If anyone in your family has hepatitis B, other family members should have a hepatitis B test. If they are not immune, they should get the hepatitis B vaccination.

Can I have a boyfriend/girlfriend?

Yes, you can. You will need to decide when to talk about hepatitis B with your boyfriend/girlfriend. Hepatitis B can be sexually transmitted. Your partner should be tested for hepatitis B and get the hepatitis B vaccine if not already immune.

Can I get married?

Yes. All people with hepatitis B can get married. Your partner should be tested for hepatitis B and get the hepatitis B vaccine if not already immune.

Can I have children?

Yes. If you are a woman with hepatitis B, you can have a healthy baby if your baby gets the first dose of the hepatitis B vaccine and hepatitis B immunoglobulin (HBIG) within 12 hours of being born, and 3 more doses of the hepatitis B vaccine at 2, 4, and 6 months of age.

Some pregnant women with a high hepatitis B viral load may need medication in the last few months of pregnancy to reduce the risk of passing the virus onto the baby. By doing this, the chance of your baby getting hepatitis B can be greatly reduced (to less than 5%).

The child should be tested 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.

If you are a man with hepatitis B, your partner can have a baby. Your baby will just need the normal hepatitis B vaccine injections.



Part 5

Disclosure, confidentiality, discrimination

Who should I tell if I have hepatitis B?

In Australia, you do not have to tell anyone you have hepatitis B, except in a small number of situations, including:

- If you are a healthcare worker conducting ‘invasive or exposure prone procedures’. This means surgery or other procedures that may require a nurse, surgeon or other healthcare provider to work inside the body of another person.
- If seeking employment in the Australian Defence Force.
- If donating blood or blood products (such as plasma), semen, ova, or organs.
- When applying for life, disability or income protection insurance or superannuation.

You should use condoms and lubricants when engaging in sexual activity with your partner unless your partner gets the hepatitis B vaccine.

What jobs can I do if I have hepatitis B?

People with hepatitis B can do nearly every job, but there may be some restrictions on certain roles including in the healthcare field and in the Australian Defence force, as listed above.

What should I do if someone refuses to provide services because I have hepatitis B?

It is against the law for people to discriminate against you or provide sub-optimal services to you for having hepatitis B. If this happens, you should contact the Anti-Discrimination Commission of Queensland (www.adcq.qld.gov.au/)

Part 6

Tips

Talk to your doctor

- Mark your appointment dates on your calendar.
- Make a list of questions you want to ask your doctor before your appointment.
- If you don't understand any information the doctor tells you, then ask questions to clarify. There are no wrong questions.
- If you think you will need more time with your doctor to understand your results you can make a longer appointment.
- If you need an interpreter, ask for one when you make your appointment. Interpreter services are free.
- If you are not happy with your GP, you can change at any time.

Get medication

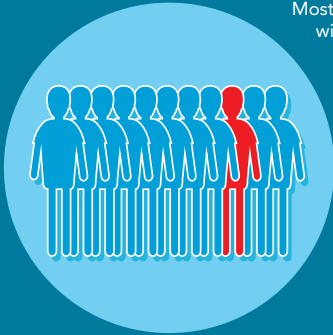
- You need a prescription from your doctor (a specialist or a GP trained in hepatitis B treatment) before you can get hepatitis B medicine.
- Your treating doctor and pharmacist should provide information about your medicine when you start. If you have any questions about your medication, please ask.
- You can also ask for an interpreter when you see your pharmacist for your medication. Interpreter services are free.
- It may take a few days for your community pharmacist to get the hepatitis B medicine for you. Therefore you should tell your pharmacist in advance before you pick up the medicine. Do not wait until you have run out of medicine.

Inform doctors or hospital liver clinics (gastroenterology/hepatology department)

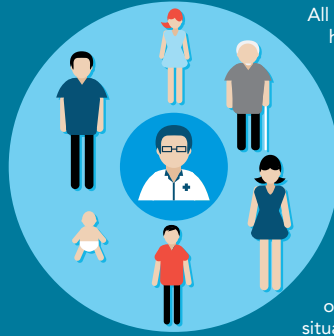
- If you have changed your home address, home phone number or mobile number.

- If you cannot make your next appointment or you want to change your appointment.
- If you have changed your GP or specialist.
- If you have started or plan to start taking any herbs or traditional medicines.
- If you are travelling overseas and you are on medication, you need to tell your treating doctor to make sure you have enough medicine while you are away and until you see the doctor again. Also ask for a letter about the hepatitis B medicines you will be taking with you.
- If you are pregnant, think you are pregnant , or if you want to become pregnant.

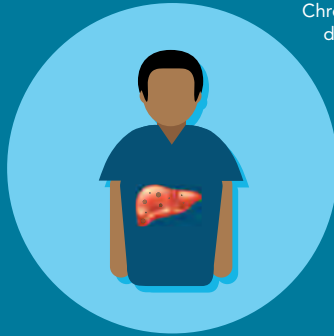




Most people with chronic hepatitis B (infection longer than 6 months) feel well and don't have any symptoms.



All people with chronic hepatitis B need regular check-ups throughout their whole life. Most people need a check-up every 6 months, but some people need a check-up every 3 months or 12 months depending on the individual situation.



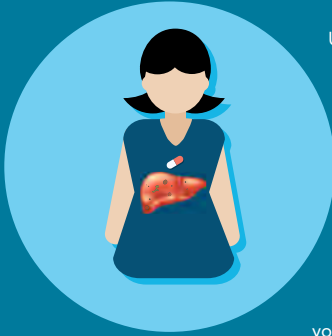
Chronic hepatitis B can damage your liver without you feeling anything. Regular check-ups are the only way to find out if your liver has changed. This can prevent liver cirrhosis, liver failure or liver cancer.



Not everyone with chronic hepatitis B needs medicine. The need for medicine depends on the results of your regular check-ups.



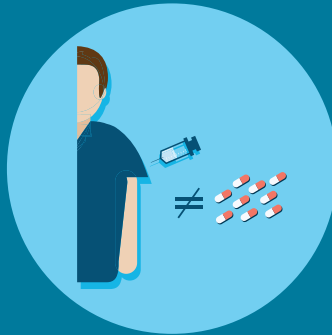
Hepatitis B medicine can reduce the amount of hepatitis B virus in the body. The medicine works in your body even though you don't feel anything. Once on medicine, most people need to continue medicine for life.



Undetectable hepatitis B viral load means the virus level in your body is very low and it doesn't show in your blood. It doesn't mean your body has cleared the virus.



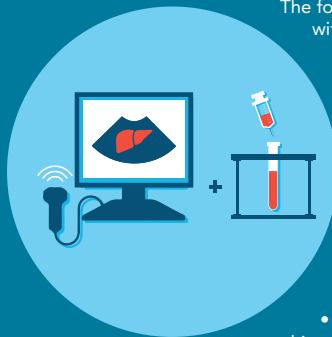
People living with chronic hepatitis B can still transmit the hepatitis B virus. Family members should get tested and vaccinated (if non-immune).



The hepatitis B vaccine is for prevention, not for treatment. If you already have chronic hepatitis B, the vaccine can't help you.



People with chronic hepatitis B should not drink alcohol or smoke.



The following people living with chronic hepatitis B should have regular liver cancer screening:

- African men and women aged over 20 years
- Asian men aged over 40 years and women over 50 years
- Anyone with liver cirrhosis
- Anyone with a family history of liver cancer
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over 50 years

Part 7

Further information and support

Where can I get more information or support?

If you are a migrant or refugee, please contact Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland (ECCQ) if you or your family requires hepatitis B information or support in English or other languages. ECCQ provides these services for free.

You can also contact your GP or liver clinic nurse for more information or if you require assistance with your hepatitis B.

Ethnic Communities Council Queensland (ECCQ)

Website: www.eccq.com.au/health

Phone: (07) 3255 1540

Email: health@eccq.com.au

You can also find information from:

Queensland Health

Website: www.health.qld.gov.au

Hepatitis Queensland

Website: www.hepqld.asn.au

Hepatitis Australia

Website: www.hepatitisaustralia.com

Gastroenterological Society of Australia

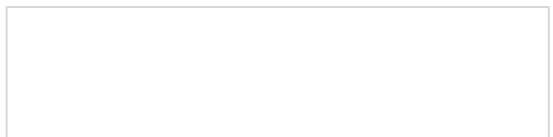
Website: www.gesa.org.au

Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine (ASHM)

Website: www.ashm.org.au



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