

# Testing for Blood Borne Viruses

## Information for patients

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### What are blood borne viruses (BBVs)?

HIV, Hepatitis B and Hepatitis C are blood borne viruses.

Some of the ways you can get a blood borne virus are:

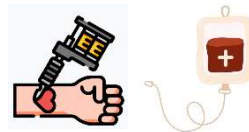
- Having vaginal, anal or oral sex without using a condom or dam.



- Sharing injecting or snorting equipment including spoons, filters, straws and water.



- Unsterile medical treatment or unsterile body piercing/tattoos. This includes blood transfusions given before 1991.



Blood borne viruses can also be passed from mother to unborn baby.

- The risk of getting Hepatitis B is higher in some parts of the world, including: Africa, Asia, the Middle East, parts of South America and Eastern Europe. If you have lived in or travelled to these areas you could be at risk of infection.



- Men who have sex with men are at higher risk of Hepatitis B and HIV.



- People who have injected drugs are at risk of Hepatitis C.



## How do the viruses affect people?

Most people have a short flu-like illness 2 to 6 weeks after an **HIV** infection. After these symptoms disappear, HIV may not cause any symptoms for many years, although the virus continues to damage the immune system.

**Hepatitis B** can cause a mild or severe inflammation of the liver with jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes). Many people will clear the infection after 1 to 3 months. About 10% of people will develop a long-term infection which can cause scarring of the liver (cirrhosis) and cancer.

**Hepatitis C** often causes no noticeable symptoms, or only flu-like symptoms. People with the infection may feel very tired and have poor concentration. If cirrhosis of the liver develops, people can be very ill and die.

**Treatment can stop the damage caused by these viruses.**

## Each virus has its own blood tests

**HIV** A positive HIV test means you have HIV. A CD4 count can show if your immune system has been damaged. Another test can show how much virus is in your blood. This is called the viral load.

**Hepatitis C** If you get a positive antibody test, another test is done to see if the virus is still active. Some people clear the virus without treatment. Up to 80% of infected people become long-term carriers of the virus with the risk of liver damage.

**Hepatitis B** A blood test will show if you have an ongoing infection. It can also show if you have had the infection and recovered.

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These viruses take time to show up in the blood tests. If you have been at risk during this time, you may be advised to get a repeat test even if your first result is negative. If you have ongoing risk you should have regular testing.

## Why test? Good treatments are available

All three viruses can cause serious illness. In the early stages many people feel well and do not realise that they are infected.

Treatment for **HIV** can stop the virus replicating, allowing the immune system to repair and preventing further damage.

Treatment for **Hepatitis C** is a course of tablets that will cure the infection. It is easy to take with few side-effects.

With treatment **Hepatitis B** can be controlled and sometimes cured.

Knowing about an infection allows you to protect your health, for example by stopping drinking alcohol if you have Hepatitis B or C. You can also protect others from getting the infection from you. Women can make choices about pregnancy and protecting their unborn child from HIV and Hepatitis B.

## Are there reasons not to have a test?

No. It is much better to know if you have a BBV infection so you can have the treatment that will control or cure the infection. People do cope with knowing they are infected and lots of support is available.

## Going for BBV tests

You can have **confidential** testing either with your GP or at the places listed below. Many services who work with people at risk offer finger prick testing.

Think about who you would tell if you got a positive result. If you tell people you are going for a test they may ask about the result. All services are confidential and will not disclose your result without your consent. In most cases you will be given the result in person. It is important to return to your GP or hospital to discuss your results.

You can get self-test kits for HIV. If you get a positive result from a self-test kit it is important that you contact Chalmers Sexual Health Centre to get your result confirmed and to discuss treatment. You can be tested anonymously at Chalmers Sexual Health Centre.

## Contact Details

**Chalmers Sexual Health Centre** 2a Chalmers Street, Edinburgh.

Tel: **0131 536 1070** Website: [www.lothiansexualhealth.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.lothiansexualhealth.scot.nhs.uk)

**Ward 41, Regional Infectious Disease Unit Outpatients'**

**Department (OPD)** Testing is by appointment. Tel: **0131 537 2820**

**Blood Borne Virus Outreach Testing** Clinics across Lothian.

Telephone the Community BBV Nurse Team on: **0131 537 2820**

**Waverley Care** Tel: **0131 558 1425**

Email: [info@waverleycare.org](mailto:info@waverleycare.org)

Website: [www.waverleycare.org](http://www.waverleycare.org) (for information and live chat)