

# Chief Health Officer Alert Hepatitis C Cluster

## Information for doctors

**Friday, 9 April 2010**

The Victorian Department of Health has identified a cluster of hepatitis C cases among patients treated by a medical professional in Melbourne. The Department of Health is conducting a 'look-back' to inform exposed people of their potential risk and offer testing, and referral if needed.

A clear risk has been established for patients treated by the doctor at Croydon Day Surgery between August 2008 and August 2009 but the doctor had worked at the clinic from 2006 to 2009.

Some of your patients may have learnt about the hepatitis C cluster at Croydon Day Surgery from the media. However, only a certain proportion of patients who underwent a procedure at this facility would have been treated by the implicated doctor. Concerned patients may approach you seeking your advice.

The Department of Health has established a call centre and a team to conduct a 'look-back' on patients treated at Croydon Day Surgery. The Department of Health will directly and confidentially contact patients who were treated by the doctor at this facility. The call centre will answer queries from concerned patients from Croydon Day Surgery, medical practitioners and the public.

If a patient who has had a procedure at Croydon Day Surgery between 2006 and mid-December 2009 wishes to have a blood test before being contacted by the Department, please test this patient through your usual pathology process and advise the Department if any positive results are identified and indicate that this is a Croydon Day Surgery patient.

The doctor has also worked at other health care facilities. At this stage we have no evidence to believe that there is an increased risk at any other facility. However, the Department of Health is continuing to investigate and will notify you if this situation changes.

Patients identified as having hepatitis C will be offered referral to an Infectious Diseases Physician or Gastroenterologist for treatment and referral to a counsellor if required.

If you or your patients have any questions, please contact the call centre on 1300 365 677 from 8 am to 10 pm.

### **Information about hepatitis C**

Hepatitis C virus is primarily transmitted by blood-to-blood contact. The incubation period for hepatitis C ranges from 2 weeks to 6 months, and commonly 6 to 9 weeks after exposure serum ALT levels rise. Infection can result in both acute and chronic hepatitis. Many patients acutely infected with hepatitis C are asymptomatic and may not be aware that they have hepatitis C.

Approximately one third of patients will clear the hepatitis C virus from their blood. Over 70% of patients who have been infected may develop chronic hepatitis C. Of those, approximately 10-20% may develop liver cirrhosis and an estimated 5% may develop hepatocellular carcinoma.

The diagnosis of hepatitis C infection is confirmed by testing for hepatitis C virus antibody and PCR to detect viral RNA. Treatment for hepatitis C is available with good success rates depending on genotype.

### **Notification of hepatitis C**

Under Schedule 4 of the Public Health and Wellbeing Regulations 2009, hepatitis C is required to be notified to the Department of Health by medical practitioners within five days of diagnosis.

Notifications for cases linked to this Look-back can be made by calling 1300 365 677.

General notifications not linked to this Look-back can be faxed to 1300 651 170.

Further information about hepatitis C can be obtained by visiting our websites at:

[www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas/diseases/hepc](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas/diseases/hepc)

[www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Hepatitis\\_C\\_the-facts?open](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/bhcv2/bhcarticles.nsf/pages/Hepatitis_C_the-facts?open)

[www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas/bluebook/hepatitis\\_C](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/ideas/bluebook/hepatitis_C)

Patients may also wish to call the Hepatitis C information line on 1800 703 003.

Yours sincerely



Dr John Carnie  
Chief Health Officer