

New Hepatitis C medicines – Factsheet for patients and consumers

The Turnbull Government has set aside over \$1 billion over five years to subsidise a range of breakthrough medicines on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) that could all but eradicate Hepatitis C in Australia within a generation.

What is Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is an infectious disease that attacks the liver, causing its inflammation, and may lead to cirrhosis, end-stage liver disease, and liver cancer and in some cases death. Six different genotypes of Hepatitis C have been identified, some of which have subtypes. Genotypes 1 and 3 are the most common causes of Hepatitis C in Australia and together make up 90% of all cases.

How many Australians are affected by Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is the most prevalent blood-borne virus in Australia and is estimated to affect approximately 1% of the population, with around 230,000 sufferers.

Who gets Hepatitis C?

Hepatitis C is caused by a blood-borne virus and can be transmitted through infected blood, for example through exposure to contaminated blood products, breakdowns in infection control in healthcare, mother to child transmission, unsafe tattooing or body piercing practices, or sharing of injecting equipment.

Why is the Government making new medicines available for Hepatitis C on the PBS?

Recent advances in antiviral treatment have led to development of new medicines, which have a cure rate of greater than 90 per cent. Treatment with the medicines is also shorter in duration, less complex and much better tolerated than traditional treatments.

When will these treatments be available?

The new treatments for patients with chronic Hepatitis C will be made available through the PBS from 1 March 2016.

Are the new treatments being made available for all patients with Hepatitis C?

Yes. The new treatments are being made available through the PBS for all patients with chronic Hepatitis C infection, across all disease genotypes and disease severities. However, the treatments which are available for a particular patient will depend on the patient's disease genotype and whether they have previously had treatment for their Hepatitis C.

Who can prescribe these new medicines?

General practitioners (GPs) will be able to prescribe these medicines in, or following, consultation with a specialist physician. Specialists will also be able to prescribe these medicines.

Speak with your doctor for more information about whether you should be prescribed these medicines.

Can prisoners access these medicines?

It is usually a state and territories responsibility to fund the health care of people in custodial settings. However, the Government, recognising that prisoners are a priority population for treatment of Hepatitis C, has agreed to fund the cost of these medicines for prisoners through the PBS. The state and territory health and justice departments will ensure that there are processes in place so that prisoners are prescribed and provided with these medicines.

What does treatment with the new medicines involve?

The treatment regimens for the new medicines range between 8 and 24 weeks for a complete course of treatment, depending on the patients genotype and treatment history and the drugs which the prescriber chooses to use.

The most common course of treatment lasts 12 weeks.

Some treatments require only 1 to 2 tablets once or twice a day. For some treatment regimens, up to three medicines may be required to be used together.

A small number of patients may need to use an injection as well as taking tablets.

Will these treatments have side effects?

The new Hepatitis C medicines are better tolerated than traditional treatments.

However, all medicines have the potential for side-effects. Talk to your doctor or pharmacist if you have concerns about this.

How much will it cost patients to access these medicines through the PBS?

Patients will pay no more than the relevant PBS co-payment at each dispensing of each medicine.

The current patient co-payment amounts are available on the PBS website at [www.pbs.gov.au/info/about-the-pbs#What are the current patient fees and charges](http://www.pbs.gov.au/info/about-the-pbs#What_are_the_current_patient_fees_and_charges)

The amount of co-payment is adjusted on 1 January each year in line with the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

Where can I get further information about these medicines?

Talk to your doctor or pharmacist if you want to get more information about the new treatments for Hepatitis C.

The Department of Health has information about Hepatitis C on its website at www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/portal-Hepatitis%20C