

Important health information for people who inject drugs

A guide for health professionals and immunisation providers

There has been a recent increase in notifiable conditions and changes in vaccines available for people who inject drugs.

This document is for General Practitioners (GPs) and other immunisation providers to help determine what health issues may be relevant for their patients and what vaccines or other treatment options are required.

Free Hepatitis B vaccine Immunisation is the best protection against hepatitis B. In Victoria, free hepatitis B vaccine is provided for all people who inject drugs, men who have sex with men (MSM) and people living with HIV.	All people who inject drugs	Engerix-B® 3 doses required 2nd dose 1 months after 1st dose 3rd dose 5 months after 2nd dose	Ongoing free vaccination
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To order any of the above vaccines please [complete an online vaccine order form](#) on the government immunisation website, www.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/immunisation

To receive this publication in an accessible format phone 1300 882 008 using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email immunisation@dhhs.vic.gov.au

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Free hepatitis B vaccine for people who inject drugs in Victoria

A guide for health professionals and immunisation providers

Immunisation is the best protection against hepatitis B infection and a course of vaccination is recommended for all babies and those in high-risk groups.

In Victoria, free hepatitis B vaccine is provided for all people who inject drugs.

All eligible people can access the vaccine through GP clinics and other registered immunisation providers in Victoria, including sexual health clinics.

Why has the free vaccine program been introduced?

Hepatitis B (also referred to as hep B) is caused by the hepatitis B virus and is a viral infection that can lead to serious illness or death. Hepatitis B is spread through contact with blood that contains the hepatitis B virus.

You can get hepatitis B by having condomless sex, sharing unsterile piercing or drug injecting equipment, or engaging in other activities where the blood or body fluids of a person with hepatitis B enters the bloodstream of an uninfected person.

Who is eligible to receive the free vaccine?

In Victoria, free hepatitis B vaccine is provided for people who are at increased risk including people who inject drugs or are on opioid substitution therapy.

Do I need to test for hepatitis B before vaccinating?

Testing for hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection should be done prior to vaccination, if not done previously. When testing for HBV, specifically request HBsAg, anti-HBc, and anti-HBs.

With all three results, you can reliably interpret your patient's HBV status in the vast majority of cases - and also avoid unnecessary vaccination.

Who can administer the free vaccine?

All eligible people are able to access the vaccine through GP clinics and other registered immunisation providers in Victoria, including sexual health clinics.

About the vaccine

What hepatitis B vaccine is supplied under the program and what age group can it be administered to?

The free hepatitis B vaccine brand supplied is Engerix-B®.

Engerix-B® is provided in a paediatric and adult formulation of recombinant DNA hepatitis B vaccine. The paediatric formulation is registered for use under 20 years of age and the adult formulation is registered from 20 years of age and older.

What does this vaccine protect against?

Engerix-B® provides protection against the hepatitis B infection.

How is the Engerix-B® presented?

Engerix-B® paediatric formulation presents as a 0.5ml dose and Engerix-B® adult formulation presents as a 1.0ml dose.

Both formulations are in a pre-filled syringe. Some stock will be delivered with a needle for injection and future stock will not contain a needle. Immunisation providers will need to supply the injection needle.

How is Engerix-B® administered?

Engerix-B® is administered by intramuscular injection into the deltoid muscle.

How many doses are required and what is the spacing interval of Engerix-B® to complete a course?

Engerix-B® is a three dose course with the second dose given four weeks after the first dose and the third dose given five months after the second dose.

This is an ongoing vaccine program currently in place for people who inject drugs.

If an eligible person received a complete course of hepatitis B vaccine previously, do they still require a free booster dose of Engerix-B® vaccine now?

Booster doses of hepatitis B vaccine (after completion of a primary course by using the recommended schedule) are not recommended for immunocompetent persons.

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