

OHS INFORMATION SHEET 12: HEPATITIS B IMMUNISATION FOR FIRST AIDERS

June 2006

1. Hepatitis B – what is it and how is it transmitted?

Hepatitis B is a viral disease which affects the liver and is a major public health problem world-wide. Infection with the hepatitis B virus results in serious illness and, in some cases, long term liver damage including chronic hepatitis, cirrhosis or liver cancer. Hepatitis B is transmitted by direct physical contact with infected blood or other infected body fluids or tissues.

2. Are first aiders at risk of hepatitis B?

Yes. First aiders are expected to be able to manage a variety of injuries, including those associated with blood loss. When treating an injured person, the first aider has no way of knowing whether or not the person is carrying the hepatitis B virus.

3. Do infection control procedures give sufficient protection?

First aiders are taught and must always use correct infection control procedures. In most cases, these procedures will give protection against hepatitis B. In emergency situations, however, there is still the potential to come into direct contact with blood and body fluids.

4. Is hepatitis B immunisation required for Monash University first aiders?

Yes. Any person involved in any aspect of health care (such as first aiders), whether daily or occasionally, should have hepatitis B immunisation. This includes first aiders at the workplace.

Hepatitis B immunisation is now required for all newly qualified first aiders and for those renewing their certificate, if these staff are required to act as Monash University first aiders. Hepatitis B immunisation has been given to millions of people world wide and good information is available about it. It is now given to infants as part of the Australian Standard Vaccination Schedule recommended by the NHMRC. It is also part of the school immunisation program.

5. What does hepatitis B immunisation involve?

The hepatitis B immunisation schedule requires 3 injections over a 6 month period. The first 2 injections are given one month apart and the final injection is given 6 months after the first. A blood test is required 2 months after the third injection to check immunity.

6. Does immunity always develop after the 3 injections?

Experience shows that, for most people, adequate immunity is reached after 3 injections. It is important to check each person's immunity 2 months after the third injection. This involves a blood test. If this shows that sufficient immunity to hepatitis B has developed, then no further injections are ever required. If immunity does not develop sufficiently, then a further injection is given, followed by another blood test. Very occasionally the first aider will require yet another injection and blood test. Most people require only the basic schedule.

7. Are there any side effects of the hepatitis B immunisation?

Overall, reactions to hepatitis B immunisation are few. The most common reaction is an ache or swelling or redness at the injection site and this usually settles after a day or so. Occasional reactions include fever, headache, nausea, and fatigue, while more severe reactions are very rare.

8. What if I have existing health problems?

If you are unsure about any aspect of your health, you should discuss these concerns with the clinic staff prior to immunisation.

9. What happens if a first aider is exposed?

The most critical step in this pathway is for the first aider to report immediately that there has been, or may have been, exposure to blood or body fluids. This should be done whether or not the first aider is immunised.

9.1 If, during an emergency, a first aider has direct skin contact with a patient's blood or other body fluids, the first aider should:

- wash the exposed area with warm soapy water;
- report the incident immediately to the local safety officer who should immediately contact OHSE;
- see a doctor **as soon as possible**. The doctor will arrange for a blood test to be done, from both the exposed person and the injured person, if possible, and will check records of any previous hepatitis B immunisation;
- a Hazard & Incident Report form should be completed.

9.2 If the first aider has not been immunised:

If it is not possible to ascertain that the injured person was not a hepatitis B carrier, hepatitis B immunoglobulin will need to be given within 24 hours to give immediate protection from hepatitis B infection and an immunisation course started within 7 days to enable longer term immunity to develop.

9.3 If the first aider has been fully immunised:

If the first aider's immunisation records show immunity to hepatitis B was achieved, then no further action is required.

10. Can I refuse Hepatitis B immunisation?

Hepatitis B immunisation is now required for all Monash University first aiders and if you have any concerns or queries about this immunisation contact the occupational health team before commencing first aid training.

11. When should I commence the Hepatitis B immunisation program?

As soon as first aid training is completed.

12. I am going to be a Monash University first aider and have already completed a hepatitis B course. What evidence of this do I need to produce before I commence my training?

Written evidence of your hepatitis B immunisation is required to be sent to the occupational health team, eg a letter from your doctor or blood test result slip, giving details of the hepatitis B immunisation and blood test results.

13. What if I only partially completed the hepatitis B immunisation course in the past?

You will need to contact the occupational health team to discuss this.

14. Who will arrange hepatitis B immunisation for first aiders?

Refer to the Occupational Health and Safety website to download the [Hepatitis B Immunisation Questionnaire and Consent Form](#) and follow the accompanying directions.

15. Who pays for the immunisation course and blood test?

If you are a first aider at Monash University, then your department/school/unit pays for the immunisation course and blood test.

For further information contact the Occupational Health Nurse Consultant at OHSE by phone on 990 51014, fax: 9905 3098 or by email (ohsehelpline@adm.monash.edu.au).