

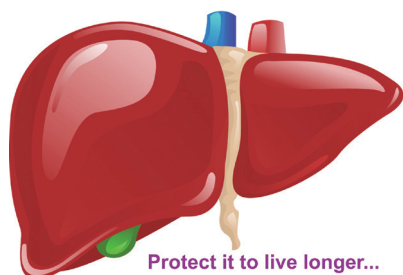
16. Health issues



Medical services for inmates are available in all prisons. If your family member in prison is concerned about their health ask them to contact the medical staff at Justice Health.

Health issues after a family member has been in prison

People in prison generally have higher rates of blood-borne viruses than the general community. Injecting drug users are especially at risk of contracting these viruses. If you have a family member in prison, make sure you know the facts about Hepatitis and HIV/AIDS. This does not mean that prisons cause disease, just that people should be aware of the risks. With the facts you can make sure everyone in your family looks after their health.



Hepatitis

Hepatitis is inflammation of the liver. Viral hepatitis refers to hepatitis caused by a few specific viruses, most commonly hepatitis A, B, or C virus. You can get vaccines to

prevent Hepatitis A and B, but there's no vaccine for Hepatitis C. Hepatitis can be caused by other things which are not virus related, for example alcohol related hepatitis or fatty liver.

Hep C

What is Hep C?

Hep C is passed on through blood-to blood contact. The most common way to get Hep C is through sharing needles (fits) and other injecting equipment such as swabs, spoons and filters. It can also be passed on through unsterile tattooing and body piercing. It's rare for Hep C to be passed on through sex, but this can occur if there's blood-to- blood contact (e.g. via menstrual blood). It can take 10 to 15 years for symptoms to start developing, and they will affect people in different ways. They can include pains in the liver area (the upper right side of the abdomen), tiredness, nausea and flu-like symptoms. Some people may develop serious liver problems later in life. Getting tested for Hep C is a good thing to do so you can get treated early. A healthy lifestyle, avoiding alcohol, eating a

balanced diet and doing exercise can improve wellbeing and prevent liver damage later on.

Will my partner, family or friends catch it?

Hep C can't be passed on to others through everyday social contact. Hep C can't be passed on by hugging, or by sharing plates, cutlery, cups, toilets, baths or laundries. Although it's extremely unlikely to be passed on through sex, there's a small risk if there could be blood-to- blood contact. It's important to use condoms or avoid sex at times when there could be blood present from either person. Mothers with Hep C are encouraged, as are all mothers, to breastfeed their babies. It's unlikely that the virus can be passed on through breastfeeding unless nipples are cracked or bleeding. If they are, mothers need to express and discard the milk until nipples are healed. If unsure see a doctor. Avoid direct contact with blood, for example don't share personal items such as toothbrushes and razors which may have blood on them. Other personal care items such as hair and nail clippers may also pose a risk if they haven't been cleaned between uses. Don't reuse syringes or share any drug using equipment.




Living with Hep C

If you know you have Hep C, there are things you can do to look after yourself. A well-balanced and healthy diet (low in animal

AROUND 2,500 AUSTRALIANS ARE CURED OF HEP C EACH MONTH

To find your local doctors and pharmacies for hep C treatment,
Google "hep nsw directory"
Or call the Infoline

HEPATITIS INFOLINE
1800 803 990
INFO, SUPPORT, REFERRALS

www.hep.org.au

fat) may help to relieve symptoms and reduce damage to the liver. Drinking less or giving up alcohol (and other drugs, including cigarettes) is recommended for someone with Hep C as these can be hard on your liver. Resting when tired helps combat fatigue. Mild exercise and maintaining a healthy weight is also important. Regular check-ups with your GP or health clinic are recommended.

There are new highly effective treatments for Hep C available through Medicare, including for people in prison, which are 8-24 weeks in duration and provide a cure for approximately 95% of people.

For more information about treatment, speak with your GP or health clinic, or phone the Hepatitis

Infoline on **1800 803 990**.

If you've never had Hep A or B, then a vaccination is recommended to prevent infection. There is no vaccination for Hep C. Even if you already have Hep C, stay clear of blood-to-blood contact to avoid contracting other blood borne viruses such as HIV or Hep B.

HIV/AIDS

HIV is the virus that causes AIDS. It's passed on through sexual fluids and blood-to-blood contact. Unsafe sex and sharing of injecting equipment are the most common means of transmission. You can reduce the risk of HIV transmission by practising safer sex, and by not reusing syringes or sharing drug use equipment.

Safer sex means correct use of a condom and water-based lubricant during penetrative (anal or vaginal) sex, using condoms or dental dams during oral sex, and wearing latex gloves when penetration with the hands or fingers occurs.

Needle and Syringe Programs (NSPs) provide new syringes and injecting equipment either free or at low cost. To find your nearest program contact ADIS on **9361 8000 or 1800 422 599**.

Pregnancy and HIV/AIDS

If you're pregnant or wish to have a baby, it's important to know if you have HIV, because if you're HIV positive you may pass it on to your baby. If you're HIV positive,

getting the right medical care early in pregnancy can greatly reduce the chance of passing HIV on to your baby. Talk to your partner, doctor or counsellor about what being infected with HIV means for you and your baby.

Getting tested

Your family member may have been tested for Hep C or HIV/AIDS while they were in prison. It's their decision what to tell you about the tests or results. You can encourage open discussion of these issues by showing you understand the facts about these diseases, and won't panic or over-react. If you've been sexually active or have been involved in high-risk activities such as injecting drugs while your partner was in prison, you should also consider being tested before your partner is released.

Testing for Hep C

You can't tell if someone has Hep C unless they have a blood test. You can look really healthy but still have Hep C. One in four people will clear the virus from their system within the first 12 months of being infected. A standard Hep C test will show they've been exposed to the virus and have antibodies. A PCR test will check to see if the virus has been cleared from the body or is still active. If a person has cleared the virus, they can't pass it on to others. Even if a person has cleared the

virus, there's no protection from getting reinfected with Hep C. The only way to avoid reinfection is avoiding contact with other people's blood.

Testing for HIV/AIDS

Testing for HIV/AIDS involves a blood test. Although there's no vaccine or cure for HIV/AIDS, there are medications that are very effective in treating the effects of the virus. Early identification of HIV and regular health checks are important for the best outcome.

Where to go for testing

You may feel comfortable discussing these issues with your doctor. But if you don't, there are information services you can contact for confidential information and advice. If you're not sure about being tested, contact the Hep C Helpline on **9332 1599 or 1800 803 990**, or the Sexual Health Info line on **1800 451 624**. You can get tested for Hep C, HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases at a Sexual Health Centre (generally free of charge) or through your own doctor.



Health centre, Dillwynia Correctional Centre

Need help?

Aboriginal Medical Services

The Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council can help you find an Aboriginal Medical Service near you. Services are also listed on the Council website.

9212 4777

www.ahmrc.org.au/members.html

Alcohol and Drug Information Service (ADIS)



Advice, information and referrals about drugs and alcohol. Ring ADIS to find the nearest Needle and Syringe Program.

9361 8000

1800 422 599 (from outside Sydney)

AIDS Council of NSW (ACON)

ACON is a health promotion organisation based in the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities, with a focus on HIV/AIDS.

9206 2000

1800 063 060

www.acon.org.au



Hepatitis Infoline & Hep Connect: Hep C Peer Support

Provides information, support and referrals about Hepatitis.

1800 803 990

www.hep.org.au

**HEPATITIS
INFOLINE**

Multicultural HIV and Hepatitis Service (MHAHS)

Bilingual services for people with HIV/AIDS or Hepatitis.

The website provides information in community languages.

9515 1234

1800 108 098

www.mhahs.org.au



NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA)

Provides safe injecting information, advocacy, support and referral for people who use drugs.

8354 7300

1800 644 413

www.nuaa.org.au



Sexual Health Infolink

Information on sexual health and to find your nearest services.

1800 451 624



Women's Information and Referral Service

Ring this service to find your nearest Women's Health Centre.

1800 817 227

Sydney Sexual Health Centre

Free testing for Hep C, HIV and other sexually transmitted infections, counselling and treatment services.

Level 3, Nightingale Wing

Sydney Hospital

Macquarie Street

Sydney

9382 7440

1800 451 624

SSHC

Need help caring for a family member with mental illness?

Justice Health & Forensic Mental Health (JH&FMH), Family Friendly Mental Health Service (FFMHS) and NSW Family & Carer Mental Health Program help families who are carers of a family member with mental illness. Families and carers can get support to keep going in their important caring role in a sustainable and satisfying way. This in turn supports longer term gains to patients' health, recovery and

quality of life. The JH&FMH Family & Carer Consultant has developed a resource package to assist carers and Client Liaison Officers are contacts for concerns or enquiries about patient care and feedback on Justice Health Services.

Call to get a resource package and further assistance.

Justice Health & Forensic Mental Health (JH&FMH)

9700 3000

Family & Carer Consultant

PO Box 150

Matraville NSW 2035

9700 3000

Client Liaison Services

PO Box 150

Matraville NSW 2035

9700 3000

Mental Health Line

(available 24 hours a day)

1800 011 511



Family Friendly Mental Health Service (FFMHS)

9391 9000

NSW Family & Carer Mental Health Program

1800 011 511 (Mental Health Line)