

# Inaugural WHO guidelines for hepatitis B and C testing now available

In 2017, the World Health Organization (WHO) published evidence-based guidelines to facilitate increased hepatitis B and C testing globally.

## THE ISSUE

The WHO has set specific targets for the elimination of hepatitis B and C as public health threats by 2030, including a 90% reduction in new chronic infections and a 65% reduction in disease-related deaths<sup>1</sup>.

One of the greatest hurdles to achieving these targets is the number of people who are infected with viral hepatitis but have not been diagnosed, and therefore treated, particularly in low and middle-income countries.

## WHAT OUR WORK FOUND

To facilitate increased testing for viral hepatitis, WHO developed guidelines for chronic hepatitis B and C testing. Burnet Institute's Professor Margaret Hellard chaired the committee that developed these inaugural guidelines. The guidelines are evidence-based but pragmatic with respect to cost. They offer recommendations on the following topics.

### Who to test?

- ▶ Hep B: general population testing, routine testing in pregnant women, focused testing in most affected populations and screening of blood donors.
- ▶ Hep C: focused testing in most affected populations, general population testing and birth cohort testing.

### How to test?

- ▶ Hep B: which serological assays to use, serological testing strategies, detection of hep B DNA as assessment for treatment, and monitoring for treatment response/disease progression.
- ▶ Hep C: which serological assays to use, serological testing strategies, detection of viraemic infection and assessment of treatment response.

### Interventions to promote uptake of hepatitis testing and linkage to care:

- ▶ Use of dried blood spot specimens for serology and nucleic acid testing.
- ▶ Other interventions to improve uptake of testing and linkage to care.

## CONCLUSION

Achieving the WHO targets for hepatitis B and hepatitis C elimination is a worthy and achievable goal. The WHO testing guidelines offer recommendations for implementing effective and pragmatic viral hepatitis testing programs.

### References

1. World Health Organization. Global health sector strategy on viral hepatitis 2016-2021. Available from: <http://www.who.int/hepatitis/strategy2016-2021/ghss-hep/en/>.



## Policy Implications

- ▶ Effective testing strategies are a critical component of eliminating hepatitis B and hepatitis C as public health threats by 2030.
- ▶ WHO testing guidelines can inform strategies at all levels of governance and healthcare provision.
- ▶ There are opportunities for research to inform future viral hepatitis testing recommendations.
- ▶ The accreditation of new rapid diagnostic tests and testing using dried blood samples was identified as a critical issue to facilitate broader and standardised use of these innovative testing approaches.

For complete details, contact Professor Margaret Hellard ([margaret.hellard@burnet.edu.au](mailto:margaret.hellard@burnet.edu.au)).

Full publications:

- WHO guidelines on hepatitis B and C testing (<http://www.who.int/hepatitis/publications/guidelines-hepatitis-c-b-testing/en/>)
- WHO Guidelines on hepatitis B and C testing - Policy Brief (<http://www.who.int/hepatitis/publications/hepatitis-testing-recommendation-policy/en/>)
- Hellard M, Chou R, Easterbrook P. WHO guidelines on testing for hepatitis B and C – meeting targets for testing. *BMC Infectious Diseases* 2017; 17 (Suppl 1): 703. doi: 10.1186/s12879-017-2765-2