



A factsheet for ADF applicants undergoing HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C virus screening

The Australian Defence Force requires people applying to join the ADF to be tested for the blood borne viruses – HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), hepatitis B and hepatitis C – before enlistment or appointment. This type of testing is called screening, as everyone is tested. Most people who are screened have a negative test result and are not infected with a blood borne virus.

It is important, if you think you may have been exposed to HIV, hepatitis B or hepatitis C, that you consult your regular doctor (general practitioner) or an appropriate health service (like a sexual health clinic) and ask for 'diagnostic testing'. You should do this before undergoing ADF screening. As it can take some weeks for the test to turn positive after a person has become infected, ADF screening tests should not be solely relied on to diagnose these infections.

What happens if you get a positive result?

If your screening test indicates that a blood borne virus infection **may** be present, you will be referred (with consent) to an appropriate health service. These may include your regular doctor or a public health service, such as a sexual health clinic.

If your screening results are not clearly positive or negative ('indeterminate'), you will also be referred (with consent) to an appropriate health service for follow-up.

Early diagnosis of blood borne virus infection is very important, as effective treatments are available. Anyone infected should be assessed for treatment by a doctor as soon as practical, to get the best outcomes.

Are you at risk of a blood borne virus?

Please use this checklist to see if you could be at risk of HIV, hepatitis B or hepatitis C infection. If you think you may be at risk, please speak to your doctor or preferred health service as soon as possible about testing.

HIV

HIV is transmitted when the virus – which is present in blood, semen or vaginal fluid – enters the blood stream of another person.

Risk factors for HIV include:

- Vaginal or anal sex without using a condom
- Sharing injecting equipment such as needles and syringes.

Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B infection is normally transmitted by blood.

Hepatitis B infection is commonly:

- Transmitted from mother to child during childbirth or soon after, in countries where the infection is common
- Transmitted to non-immune close family or household contacts of people with hepatitis B
- Transmitted by children with infection to close childhood contacts who are not immune.

Hepatitis B can also be transmitted through sex and close personal intimate contact.



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Risk factors for hepatitis B infection include:

- Unsterile surgical procedures. There is a higher risk in some overseas countries, compared to Australia
- Living with a partner, family or household member who has acute or chronic hepatitis B if you are not immune - through sharing personal items (like razors or toothbrushes) where blood may be present
- Sharing injecting equipment such as needles and syringes
- Unsterile tattooing or body piercing.

Hepatitis B infection is more common amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and people born in Asia, the Pacific and Middle East.

From 1990, Australia progressively implemented a hepatitis B immunisation program for babies at birth. As a result, many Australians born after 1990 are protected. ADF entrants who are not already protected against hepatitis B will be immunised in Service.

Hepatitis C

Hepatitis C is transmitted through blood-to-blood contact when the virus is present in the blood of one person and it enters the blood stream of another person. In Australia, hepatitis C is most commonly passed on through injecting drug use.

Risk factors for hepatitis C infection include:

- Sharing injecting equipment such as needles and syringes
- Unsterile tattooing or body piercing
- Unsterile medical procedures.

Hepatitis C is not usually transmitted sexually, despite it being possible. Hepatitis C is a common infection in some regions of the world and it is becoming increasingly common in Australia, as a result of injecting drug use.

Stay Negative

Most people screened for blood borne viruses will have negative test results and no infections. ADF entrants who do not have immunity to hepatitis B will be immunised in Service.

There is no vaccine for HIV and hepatitis C protection, so it is important for you to protect yourself, your family and your mates against these infections.

You can do this by:

- Using a condom when having sex with anyone other than a long-term, blood borne virus negative partner
- Not using injecting equipment (the ADF has a 'no drugs' policy)
- Only getting body tattoos or piercing done in a country where the industry is regulated, like Australia, and single-use, disposable equipment is used.

More information

For confidential information about blood borne viruses, you can contact your doctor, health department, public health unit or sexual health service.

General information about HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C is available from AFAO and Hepatitis Australia. These organisations can also give you contact details for community agencies and referral services who provide support and help in your area.

<http://www.afao.org.au/about-hiv>

<http://www.hepatitisaustralia.com/about-hepatitis>

