

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 A vaccine

There is an outbreak of locally acquired hepatitis A in Victoria.

The free hepatitis A vaccine is available until 31 December 2018 for all people who have injected drugs in the past 12 months and live in Victoria.

All people who have injected drugs in the past 12 months and live in Victoria

**Havrix1440®
2 doses required**

2nd dose given 6 - 12 months after 1st dose

Free from 22 January 2018 until 31 December 2018

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.

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

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

Free hepatitis A vaccine for people who inject drugs in Victoria

From 22 January 2018 until 31 December 2018 all people who have injected drugs in the past 12 months and live in Victoria will be able to get access to a free, two dose course of hepatitis A vaccine.

All eligible people will be able to 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?

There is an outbreak of locally acquired hepatitis A in Victoria. Almost all cases report men who have sex with men (MSM) sexual activity, and some have identified as people who inject drugs.

Who is eligible to receive the free vaccine?

The vaccine is free for all people who have injected drugs in the past 12 months if they live in Victoria and come forward to receive the vaccine from 22 January until 31 December 2018.

The vaccine is also free for men who have sex with men in Victoria.

Why has this cohort been chosen?

All people who have injected drugs in the past 12 months appear to be at highest risk, however local transmission to others has also been found.

It is important that all people who inject drugs are protected against this disease.

Who can administer the free vaccine?

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

Please bulk bill your patients in order to maximise access to this important public health initiative.

About the vaccine

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

The hepatitis A vaccine brand supplied is Havrix 1440®.

Havrix 1440® is an adult formulation of inactivated hepatitis A virus vaccine. The vaccine is registered for use from 16 years of age and older.

What does this vaccine protect against?

Havrix 1440® provides protection against hepatitis A infection.

How is the Havrix 1440® presented?

Havrix 1440® presents as a 1.0ml dose in a pre-filled syringe.

Some stock will be delivered with a needle for injection, however, future stock will not contain a needle and immunisation providers will need to supply the injection needle.

How is Havrix 1440® administered?

Havrix 1440® is administered by intramuscular injection into the deltoid muscle.

How many doses are required and what is the spacing interval between doses to complete a course?

Havrix 1440® is a two dose course with the second dose given six to 12 months after the first dose.

This is a time limited vaccine program ending 31 December 2018 so to complete the free vaccine course in a timely manner, it needs to be commenced as soon as possible.

If an eligible person received a complete course of hepatitis A vaccine previously, do they still require a free booster dose of Havrix 1440® vaccine now?

No. A complete course of hepatitis A vaccine provides protection against hepatitis A infection.

There is no current evidence that booster doses are required; in healthy individuals, it is quite possible that they will never be required.

If an eligible person did not receive a complete course of hepatitis A vaccine previously, do they require a free dose of Havrix 1440® vaccine now?

Yes. They should receive the Havrix 1440® vaccine to complete their course of hepatitis A vaccination.

The minimum spacing between the first and second dose of monovalent hepatitis A vaccine is six months.

If the hepatitis A course was commenced more than six months ago or an age appropriate paediatric formulation was given initially, the course can be completed now with the Havrix 1440® vaccine.

If a hepatitis A vaccine course was started with a brand different to Havrix 1440®, does the course need to be started again?

If the hepatitis A course was commenced with a brand different to Havrix 1440®, the course can be completed with the Havrix 1440® vaccine.

If the eligible person previously commenced their hepatitis A vaccine course using the combination hepatitis A/hepatitis B vaccine, Twinrix®, what vaccination is given to complete their course?

If the hepatitis A vaccine course was previously commenced with Twinrix® (the combination hepatitis A/hepatitis B vaccine) the person should complete their course with the Twinrix® brand.

However Twinrix® is not a free, government supplied vaccine and would need to be purchased on prescription.

Are there any timing interval considerations for vaccine administration with hepatitis A and hepatitis B?

The hepatitis A and hepatitis B and vaccines are inactivated vaccines and can be administered on the same day, or at any time before or after, each other using different injection sites separated by 2.5 cm.

Can a person who is living with HIV be vaccinated with Havrix 1440® vaccine?

Yes. Persons who are eligible for vaccination

under this program, who are also persons living with HIV, can be given Havrix 1440® vaccine and it does not adversely affect either the HIV load or CD4+ cell count.

If an eligible person receives the two dose course of Havrix 1440® vaccine, is a booster dose required later?

No. A complete two dose course of Havrix 1440® provides protection against hepatitis A infection.

There is no current evidence that booster doses are required; in healthy individuals, it is quite possible that they will never be required.

Can Havrix 1440® be administered with other vaccines offered free to people who inject drugs?

Yes. Multiple vaccines can be administered on the same day at different injection sites.

Are there any vaccine side effects for Havrix 1440®?

The most common side effect following administration of Havrix 1440® vaccine is a mild local reaction of short duration.

Systemic adverse events such as headache and fever are much less common than the local injection site reaction.

Free hepatitis B vaccine for people who inject drugs in Victoria

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 are able to 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 should be done prior to vaccination, if not done previously. When testing for HBV infection, 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.

This applies to children and adults, including healthcare workers and dentists.

However, booster doses are recommended for persons who are immunocompromised, in particular those with either HIV infection or renal failure. The time for boosting in such persons should be decided by regular monitoring of anti-HBs levels at six to 12 monthly intervals.

If an eligible person did not receive a complete course of hepatitis B vaccine previously, do they require a free dose of Engerix-B® vaccine now?

Yes. They should receive the Engerix-B® vaccine to complete their course of hepatitis B vaccination.

The recommended spacing between the first and second dose of monovalent hepatitis B vaccine is one month and the recommended spacing between the second and third doses is five months. A hepatitis B vaccine course does not need to be restarted.

If a hepatitis B vaccine course was started with a brand different to Engerix-B®, does the course need to be started again?

If the hepatitis B course was commenced with another brand of hepatitis B vaccine, the course can be completed now with the Engerix-B® vaccine using recommended spacing intervals.

If the eligible person previously commenced their hepatitis B vaccine course using the combination hepatitis A/hepatitis B vaccine, Twinrix®, what vaccination is given to complete their course?

If the hepatitis vaccine course was previously commenced with Twinrix®, the combination hepatitis A/hepatitis B vaccine, the person should complete their course with the Twinrix® brand.

However, Twinrix® is not a free, government supplied vaccine and would need to be purchased on prescription.

Are there any timing interval considerations for vaccine administration with hepatitis A and hepatitis B?

The hepatitis A and hepatitis B vaccines are inactivated vaccines and can be administered on the same day, or at any time before or after, each other using different injection sites separated by 2.5 cm.

Can a person who is living with HIV be vaccinated with Engerix-B® vaccine?

Yes. Adults living with HIV, and other immunocompromised adults, may be at increased risk of acquiring hepatitis B infection and also respond less well to vaccination.

Limited studies in HIV1-positive adults have demonstrated an improved and accelerated serological response to a schedule that consists of 4 double doses, comprising two injections of the standard adult dose (using Engerix-B) on each occasion, at times zero, one, two and six months.

If an eligible person receives the three dose course of Engerix-B® vaccine, is a booster dose required later?

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

This applies to children and adults, including healthcare workers and dentists.

However, booster doses are recommended for persons who are immunocompromised, in particular those with either HIV infection or renal failure. The time for boosting in such persons should be decided by regular monitoring of anti-HBs levels at six to 12 monthly intervals.

Can Engerix-B® be administered with other vaccines offered free to people who inject drugs?

Yes. Multiple vaccines can be administered on the same day at different injection sites.

Are there any vaccine side effects for Engerix-B®?

The most common side effect following administration of Engerix-B® is soreness at the injection site, fever, nausea, dizziness, malaise, myalgia and arthralgia.