

New treatments for hepatitis C available for people who inject drugs



A new generation of direct-acting antiviral medications are now available to Australians living with chronic hepatitis C. They are more effective, easier to take and have fewer side-effects than the older medications. The Australian Government has listed these new medicines on the PBS, ensuring they are accessible and affordable to all people with hepatitis C.

What are the new medicines?

The new, direct-acting antiviral (DAA) medicines available on the PBS are: • sofosbuvir + ledipasvir (Harvoni®) • sofosbuvir (Sovaldi®) • daclatasvir (Daklinza®) • ribavirin (Ibavyr®) Following a clinical assessment, these medicines are used independently or in combination with other medicines depending on the person's particular situation. For most people, this will mean treatment without the need to use interferon.

Are the new medicines better than the previous ones?

Yes, there are a number of benefits. The new medicines are:

- more effective, resulting in a cure for 90-95% of people
- taken as tablets only and have very few side-effects
- taken for as little as 8-12 weeks in most cases,
- provide interferon-free treatment options for all common genotypes in Australia.

Are the treatments for people who currently inject drugs?

There are no restrictions applied to people who inject drugs as they are a priority population for hepatitis C treatment. **Whether or not a person currently injects drugs will not be used as criteria for restricting access to the new medicines.**

What information will the doctor need to know before treatment can be prescribed?

There are a number of tests the doctor will do and information patients will be asked to provide before treatment can be prescribed. These include:

- undergoing blood tests to confirm active hepatitis C infection
- undergoing tests to determine the hepatitis C genotype (strain)
- undergoing an assessment to assess whether the patient has developed cirrhosis (liver scarring)
- discussing any previous treatment history for hepatitis C,
- identifying any other illnesses or health complaints, and
- discussing any other prescription medications, over-the-counter medications or substances the patient is taking. This is important to avoid any possible drug interactions.

How much do the medicines cost?

From 1 March 2016, patients will only be charged the usual co-payment price you pay for the dispensing fee of each prescription. As these medicines are PBS 'Authority required' the doctor can only prescribe one medicine on each prescription. This means you may be required to pay the dispensing fee for each medicine. From 1 January 2016, the dispensing fee for each prescription is \$38.30 for general patients and \$6.20 for concessional patients. This fee is reviewed each year.

For more information

Visit the Hepatitis Australia website - www.hepatitisaustralia.com/hepatitis-c-facts/treatment-for-hep-c