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For immediate release

Media Release: Low risk of hepatitis B transmission from midwife with hepatitis B

In response to recent media reports about a healthcare worker at Nepean Hospital's birth unit living with hepatitis B, Hepatitis Australia has issued the reminder that the risk of transmission in a healthcare setting is extremely low, and people living with hepatitis B can safely work in healthcare settings.

Lucy Clynes, CEO of Hepatitis Australia said:

“It is normal to feel worried about yourself and your child when this information is reported, but it's important to remember that the risk of transmission is extremely low.

Hepatitis B is transmitted through blood-to-blood contact or unprotected sexual contact. It cannot be spread through casual contact such as touching, coughing, or sneezing, and all babies should be vaccinated for hepatitis B when they are born.”

Children born in Australia after 1 May 2000 should have had the hepatitis B vaccine just after birth. Babies normally get the first dose within the first 24 hours. They will also get doses at 2, 4 and 6 months of age, protecting them against hepatitis B.

Catch up vaccination programs also delivered hepatitis B vaccines to adolescent school-based children between 2001-2013. Approximately 95% of adults who are exposed to hepatitis B will clear the virus naturally.

Dr David Carter, Associate Professor, Faculty of Law & Justice, University of NSW said:

“People living with hepatitis B can work in many healthcare jobs because they don't pose a risk to others. Under national guidelines, healthcare workers with hepatitis B can continue to work safely, with precautions in place for those performing exposure-prone procedures. These guidelines are used in Australian medical settings to support high quality infection control and employers may also have specific policies to further support patient safety.”



Exposure-prone procedures generally involve healthcare workers using sharp objects or medical instruments where there may be a risk of transmission of hepatitis. A list of examples of these procedures are included in the guidelines.

Ms Clynes is urging anyone with concerns to reach out to HepLink, the national hepatitis information service.

“HepLink is a confidential, free service for anyone in Australia who has concerns or would just like to know more about hepatitis B. You can call them on 1800 437 222.

“It is important that information about hepatitis B is accurately reported because misinformation fuels stigma and unnecessary anxiety.”

For anyone who has concerns or would like more information, HepLink offers confidential support and guidance on hepatitis B transmission, testing, and management. You can call 1800 437 222 visit www.heplink.au

Background information

Guidelines for healthcare workers on managing bloodborne viruses are available through the Department of Health website here:

<https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/cdna-national-guidelines-for-healthcare-workers-on-managing-bloodborne-viruses>

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