

## Joint Statement: Hepatitis B and hepatitis C are not transmitted through saliva

2 September 2022

Recent news articles published in Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory have incorrectly suggested that hepatitis C and hepatitis B can be transmitted through saliva. [Hepatitis Australia](#), as the national peak representing the interests of people affected by viral hepatitis and its members, and the [Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine \(ASHM\)](#), as the national peak organisation of health professionals in Australia and New Zealand who work in HIV, viral hepatitis and sexually transmissible infections, issue this public statement in response.

### Hepatitis B and hepatitis C are not transmitted through saliva.

No one should be spat on; however, media and other bodies have a responsibility to not spread misinformation. Misinformation about viral hepatitis transmission increases stigma and discrimination and causes undue stress for Police Officers, bus drivers and other workers if they incorrectly believe they could be at risk.

Hepatitis C is transmitted when sufficient quantities of blood of an infected person enter the blood stream of another person. Hepatitis B is also transmitted this way, and sexually.

A 2018 literature review<sup>1</sup> to clarify the risk of viral hepatitis infection through biting and spitting searched nine international medical journal databases and identified only one case anywhere in the world where hepatitis B transmission through spitting was considered plausible.

The evidence shows that saliva can contain but not transmit blood borne viruses unless there is sufficient blood contamination. Even then, the risk of transmission of these viruses to police, bus drivers and other workers in the community via occupational exposure is negligible.

In the unlikely event that a police officer, bus driver or other worker is exposed to a plausible risk of contracting a blood borne virus through occupational exposure:

- Hepatitis B is vaccine preventable. For those who have not been vaccinated or exposed previously, hepatitis B is resolved naturally (i.e. 'cleared', without treatment) by 90 per cent of adults.<sup>2</sup> There is also post-exposure prophylaxis available for hepatitis B, which further reduces the chances of infection.
- Hepatitis C is curable, and in most cases requires only 8-12 weeks of tablets.<sup>3</sup>
- The officer or frontline worker is not faced with the often-propagandised "agonising six-month wait" to find out whether they are infected.

According to the Australia New Zealand Policing Advisory Agency and the Australasian Society for HIV, Viral Hepatitis and Sexual Health Medicine (ASHM)<sup>4</sup>:

- All Officers should be vaccinated against hepatitis B to protect themselves and others.
- All Officers are required to show proof of immunity and/or age-appropriate vaccination.

You can get accurate information about hepatitis B and hepatitis C here:

- [Hepatitis B](#)
- [Hepatitis C](#)
- Anyone can access confidential information and support via the National Hepatitis Infoline: 1800 437 222

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#### References

1. Pintilie, H & Brook, D. 2018, [Commentary: A review of risk of hepatitis B and C transmission through biting or spitting](#). 2. [Third National Hepatitis B Strategy 2018-2022](#). 3. [A cure for hepatitis C](#). 4. [Police and Blood Borne Viruses](#)