



Australian Government

**Australian Institute of
Health and Welfare**

Hepatitis B in Australia

Quick facts

Vaccination has reduced the number of people becoming infected with hepatitis B in Australia.

Young adults are at greatest risk of becoming infected with hepatitis B.

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a potentially life-threatening liver infection caused by the hepatitis B virus. It is transmitted by contact with blood or body fluids from an infected person. Hepatitis B can also be transmitted from an infected mother to her baby at birth. This is particularly serious, as most babies infected at birth will become chronically infected with hepatitis B.

Many people, especially young children, do not have any symptoms during the acute infection phase. Other people have symptoms that last several weeks, including yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice), dark urine, extreme tiredness, nausea, vomiting and stomach pain.

While most older children and adults get rid of the virus, up to 10% develop chronic liver disease, often many years after the acute infection. This puts them at high risk of death from liver cirrhosis (permanent scarring causing loss of liver function) or liver cancer.

Vaccination against hepatitis B

Vaccination against hepatitis B in Australia began in the early 1980s and targeted those at most risk of infection. Free infant vaccination began in 1990 in the Northern Territory and was rolled out nationally in 2000. The Australian National Immunisation Program provides vaccination against hepatitis B at birth and during infancy.

Vaccination is also recommended for some adults who are at higher risk, for example, people who have had organ transplants, people with certain liver or kidney problems, and people who travel to countries where hepatitis B is common.

In 2017, 95% of Australian 1 year olds were fully vaccinated against hepatitis B; however, vaccination rates vary by where a child lives.

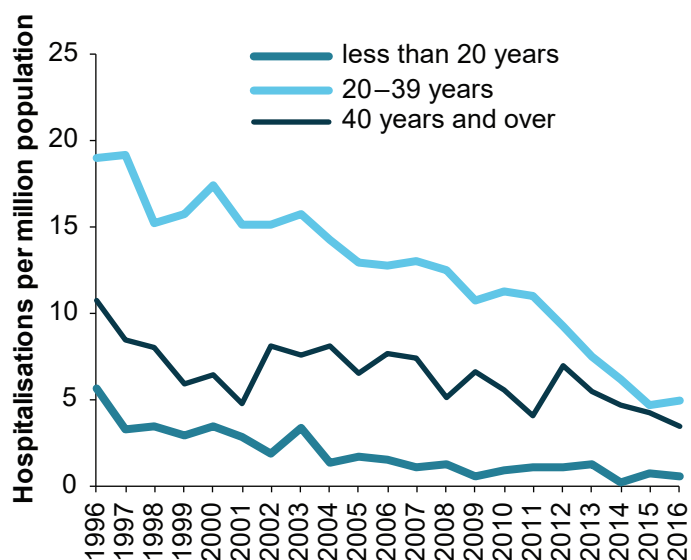
Hepatitis B notifications

Hepatitis B is a nationally notifiable disease in Australia, which means that diagnosed cases of hepatitis B are reported to state or territory health departments. However, the number of notifications is likely to be an underestimate of the number people infected with hepatitis B in Australia. Many people infected with hepatitis B have no symptoms and do not know about their infection, particularly those born overseas in countries where hepatitis B is common, many of whom were infected at birth.

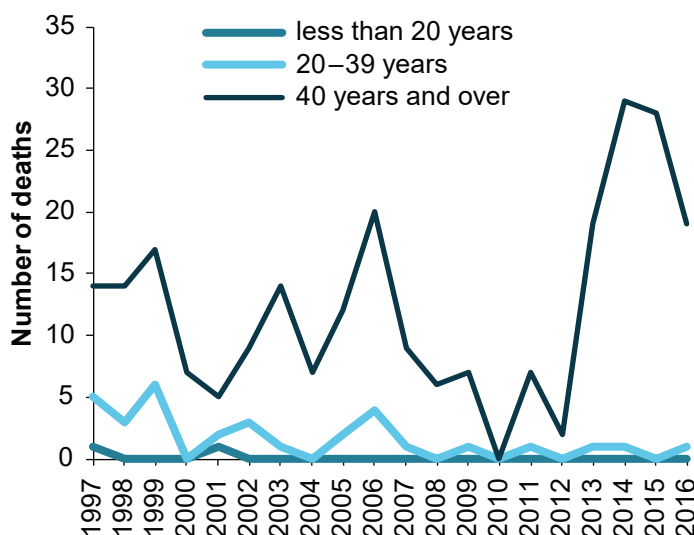
Hospitalisations and deaths due to hepatitis B

In 2016, there were 76 hospital admissions for acute hepatitis B in Australia. Between 1996 and 2016, the hospitalisation rate was highest among people aged 20–39, but decreased in all age groups (left figure).

Between 1997 and 2016, acute hepatitis B caused 279 deaths in Australia. Most (88%) of these deaths were of people aged 40 years and over.



Source: AIHW analysis of National Hospital Morbidity Database.



Source: AIHW analysis of National Mortality Database.

This fact sheet is part of the [Vaccine-preventable diseases](#) release. For more information see [Immunisation](#) on the AIHW website.

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