

# New treatments available for hepatitis C as of March 2016



## Testing and treatment

## Hepatitis Queensland

Reviewed: 14 February 2016, Valid to: 1 March 2016

### What new medications are being listed for people with hepatitis C?

In December 2015 the Federal Government announced that the following medications would be listed on the PBS on 1 March 2016;

- sofosbuvir + ledipasvir (Harvoni®)
- sofosbuvir (Sovaldi®)
- daclatasvir (Daklinza®)
- ribavirin (Ibavyr®).

This means that people with hepatitis C who have a Medicare card can access these medications regardless of how damaged their liver is.



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### Are the new medications better than the older ones?

There are a number of benefits. The new medications;

- Are more effective, resulting in a cure for over 90% of people
- Are taken as tablets only and have very few side effects
- Can be taken for as little as eight to twelve weeks for most people
- Most people\* will not need pegylated interferon as part of the regimen.

\*people with genotype 4 or 6 still need pegylated interferon

### What medication is for what genotype?

The particular combination of medications will be decided by your liver specialist. As a guide;

- **Genotype 1** - sofosbuvir + ledipasvir or sofosbuvir + daclatasvir (95% cure)
- **Genotype 2** - sofosbuvir + ribavirin (93% cure)
- **Genotype 3** - sofosbuvir + daclatasvir (95% cure).

People living with cirrhosis may need to be on treatment longer or, have ribavirin added into their treatment.

The table below is a guide to how long treatment may be depending on which combinations of medications you have to take.

sofosbuvir + ledipasvir	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 weeks for people who haven't done treatment before, don't have cirrhosis and viral load less than 6 million IU/ml</li> <li>• 12 weeks for people who haven't done treatment before, don't have cirrhosis and viral load more than 6 million IU/ml</li> <li>• 12 weeks for people who haven't done treatment before and who have cirrhosis</li> <li>• 24 weeks for people who have done treatment before and who have cirrhosis.</li> </ul>
sofosbuvir + daclatasvir	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 12 weeks (although likely longer for people who have cirrhosis)</li> <li>• 24 weeks for people with genotype 3 who have cirrhosis</li> </ul>
sofosbuvir + ribavirin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 12 weeks for people with genotype 2</li> </ul>
sofosbuvir + daclatasvir + ribavirin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 12 to 16 weeks for people with genotype 3 and who have cirrhosis</li> </ul>

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### When will new medications be available in Australia?

The new medications will be available on the PBS from 1 March 2016.

### Will other medications be listed too?

There are other medications currently being considered for PBAC and PBS listing. Updates will be provided as details are finalised.

These medications are;

- **Genotype 1** - paritaprevir + ombitasvir + dasabavir (+/- ribavirin) (Viekira Pak®)
- **Genotype 1,4,6** - grazoprevir + elbasvir (Zepatier®).

### Is treatment now available from GPs?

The government has said that GPs will be able to prescribe these medications. They will be required to consult with a specialist clinician. But all GPs will be eligible to prescribe from 1<sup>st</sup> March. Some GPs will be seeking additional training to prescribe the new medications. Specialists in hospital liver clinics will continue to prescribe the new medications.

### How do I get onto hepatitis C treatment now?

You can go to your GP and receive treatment there, or get a referral from your GP to receive treatment at a liver clinic. Some regions also have hepatitis C treatment programs well established in the community through Aboriginal Medical Services, community health centres, sexual health clinics and needle and syringe programs. It is your choice where you have your treatment. Get informed where experienced and hep C friendly doctors are in your community.

### Will access to the new medications be restricted or limited in any way?

No. The new medications will be available through the PBS to all adults who hold a Medicare card and have chronic hepatitis C - regardless of how damaged their liver is. The combination of medications prescribed will depend on a number of individual clinical factors. Interferon-free treatment options will be available for all major genotypes in Australia.

### Will people who currently inject drugs be able to access the new medications?

Yes. There will be no restrictions applied for people who inject drugs as they are a priority population for hepatitis C treatment. For more information about accessing treatment in a needle and syringe program (NSP) contact QuIHN on 1800 172 076.

### Will people in prison be able to access the new medications?

Yes. It is usually a state and territory responsibility to fund the health care of people in prison, however the Australian Government has agreed to fund the treatment for prisoners because they are a priority population for hepatitis C.

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### What if I am waiting for the new medications?

It is important to take care of your liver even when you are waiting for treatment. It is possible that the waiting lists for treatment may increase from 1 March 2016. You can do simple things to look after your liver and hepatitis C;

- See your GP or liver specialist every year for a liver check up
- Limit your alcohol if you choose to drink
- Limit your cigarettes if you choose to smoke
- Eat a well balanced diet with lots of fruit and vegetables
- Increase exercise



### Do the medications really cost the government around \$100,000 per treatment?

The actual price to be paid is not public knowledge as it is a matter of commercial negotiation between the government and the pharmaceutical companies. Often the 'list price' (e.g. \$100,000) is quoted in reports but this does not acknowledge any negotiated discounts being applied. Once applied, the true cost to government is substantially less than the 'list price'.

### How much will the medications cost me?

Once the PBS listing takes effect on 1 March 2016, you will only be charged the usual co-payment price you pay for a prescription. From 1 January 2016 this is \$38.30 for general patients and \$6.20 for concessional patients.

### Is it true that the hepatitis C PBS listing is under threat if the government's proposed budget cuts to bulk-billing of blood tests and X-rays are not approved by the Senate?

No. We have received advice from the Minister's office that the government funding for the PBS listing for the new hepatitis C medications on 1 March 2016 has been approved and is committed. This means the PBS listing is not dependent on legislation being passed for proposed health reforms.

### Interested in finding out more?

#### Factsheets

- Importing new hepatitis C medication in Australia
- Alcohol and viral hepatitis
- What is a healthy diet for someone with hepatitis?

If you have a question email Hepatitis Queensland at [info@hepqld.asn.au](mailto:info@hepqld.asn.au) or call the infoline on 1800 648 491

Hepatitis Queensland would like to acknowledge Hepatitis Australia and Hepatitis NSW for their permission to adapt existing factsheets.

*The ABC of Hepatitis Training Package is an initiative of Hepatitis Queensland through funding provided by Queensland Health.*