A factsheet for ADF applicants undergoing HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C virus screening

The Australian Defence Force requires people applying to join the ADF to be tested for the blood borne viruses – HIV (human immunodeficiency virus), hepatitis B and hepatitis C – before enlistment or appointment. This type of testing is called screening, as everyone is tested. Most people who are screened have a negative test result and are not infected with a blood borne virus.

It is important, if you think you may have been exposed to HIV, hepatitis B or hepatitis C, that you consult your regular doctor (general practitioner) or an appropriate health service (like a sexual health clinic) and ask for ‘diagnostic testing.’ You should do this before undergoing ADF screening. As it can take some weeks for the test to turn positive after a person has become infected, ADF screening tests should not be solely relied on to diagnose these infections.

What happens if you get a positive result?
If your screening test indicates that a blood borne virus infection may be present, you will be referred (with consent) to an appropriate health service. These may include your regular doctor or a public health service, such as a sexual health clinic.

If your screening results are not clearly positive or negative (indeterminate), you will also be referred (with consent) to an appropriate health service for follow-up.

Early diagnosis of blood borne virus infection is very important, as effective treatments are available. Anyone infected should be assessed for treatment by a doctor as soon as practical, to get the best outcomes.

Are you at risk of a blood borne virus?
Please use this checklist to see if you could be at risk of HIV, hepatitis B or hepatitis C infection. If you think you may be at risk, please speak to your doctor or preferred health service as soon as possible about testing.

HIV
HIV is transmitted when the virus – which is present in blood, semen or vaginal fluid – enters the blood stream of another person.

Risk factors for HIV include:
• Vaginal or anal sex without using a condom
• Sharing injecting equipment such as needles and syringes.

Hepatitis B
Hepatitis B infection is normally transmitted by blood.

Hepatitis B infection is commonly:
• Transmitted from mother to child during childbirth or soon after, in countries where the infection is common
• Transmitted to non-immune close family or household contacts of people with hepatitis B
• Transmitted by children with infection to close childhood contacts who are not immune.

Hepatitis B can also be transmitted though sex and close personal intimate contact.
Risk factors for hepatitis B infection include:

- Unsterile surgical procedures. There is a higher risk in some overseas countries, compared to Australia
- Living with a partner, family or household member who has acute or chronic hepatitis B if you are not immune - through sharing personal items (like razors or toothbrushes) where blood may be present
- Sharing injecting equipment such as needles and syringes
- Unsterile tattooing or body piercing.

Hepatitis B infection is more common amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and people born in Asia, the Pacific and Middle East.

From 1990, Australia progressively implemented a hepatitis B immunisation program for babies at birth. As a result, many Australians born after 1990 are protected. ADF entrants who are not already protected against hepatitis B will be immunised in Service.

**Hepatitis C**

Hepatitis C is transmitted through blood-to-blood contact when the virus is present in the blood of one person and it enters the blood stream of another person. In Australia, hepatitis C is most commonly passed on through injecting drug use.

Risk factors for hepatitis C infection include:

- Sharing injecting equipment such as needles and syringes
- Unsterile tattooing or body piercing
- Unsterile medical procedures.

Hepatitis C is not usually transmitted sexually, despite it being possible. Hepatitis C is a common infection in some regions of the world and it is becoming increasingly common in Australia, as a result of injecting drug use.

**Stay Negative**

Most people screened for blood borne viruses will have negative test results and no infections. ADF entrants who do not have immunity to hepatitis B will be immunised in Service.

There is no vaccine for HIV and hepatitis C protection, so it is important for you to protect yourself, your family and your mates against these infections.

You can do this by:

- Using a condom when having sex with anyone other than a long-term, blood borne virus negative partner
- Not using injecting equipment (the ADF has a ‘no drugs’ policy)
- Only getting body tattoos or piercing done in a country where the industry is regulated, like Australia, and single-use, disposable equipment is used.

**More information**

For confidential information about blood borne viruses, you can contact your doctor, health department, public health unit or sexual health service.

General information about HIV, hepatitis B and hepatitis C is available from AFAO and Hepatitis Australia. These organisations can also give you contact details for community agencies and referral services who provide support and help in your area.

http://www.hepatitisaustralia.com/about-hepatitis