



# Blood Borne Viruses: Advice & Guidance

## What are Blood Borne Viruses?

Blood Borne Viruses (BBVs) are illnesses which are spread from person to person through contact with infected blood. Some can also be passed on through unprotected sex. Not everyone who is infected with a BBV will show symptoms, so if you are at risk it is important to get checked out. This will allow you to seek appropriate treatment, and take measures to reduce the risk of you passing an illness on to anyone else.

**Human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)** is a virus which attacks the body's immune system.

**Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)** describes a set of illnesses that people with HIV develop if they do not receive treatment. Although there is not currently a vaccine or a cure for HIV, if it is treated early it can be managed well with medication.

**Hepatitis B** is a virus which affects the liver. It may be more-or-less symptomless, but some sufferers notice flu-like symptoms, nausea/ diarrhoea, and jaundice (yellowing of the skin/eyes). There is an effective vaccine for Hepatitis B, and most people who contract it make a full recovery.

**Hepatitis C** has similar symptoms to Hepatitis B, but is much more difficult to treat. Although treatment has become more effective in recent years, it can last between 12 weeks and 12 months and can cause unpleasant side effects. There is not currently a vaccine for Hepatitis C, and if untreated it can lead to serious liver damage.

## Who is at risk?

BBVs are primarily spread via contact with infected blood. Drug-users who share injecting equipment (such as needles, syringes, spoons, filters and swabs) are at a much higher risk of contracting BBVs. Sharing banknotes or straws to snort drugs is also a risk factor, as the inside of the nose can bleed and leave behind traces of blood. Some BBVs can be passed on through unprotected sex – anal sex is particularly risky as there is a much greater chance of breaking the skin, and it involves a part of the body with a large blood supply.

## How to get checked

The more common BBVs, such as Hepatitis B/C and HIV, can be detected with a quick and easy blood test. This can be done with a finger-prick so there is generally no need for blood to be drawn. DHI offers free BBV testing for any client who wants it, and we encourage anyone who injects or snorts drugs to get checked out. Tests can also be carried out by your GP if you are believed to be at risk.

## Reducing your risk

The simplest way of reducing the risk of contracting (or passing on) a BBV is to avoid activities which could put you in contact with another person's blood/bodily fluids – such as drug use and

unprotected sex. However, there are many reasons why this advice may be difficult to follow, and these tips can help you to manage the risk if you choose to engage in “risky” activities.

- ❖ If you choose to have sex without using a condom, ideally both you and your partner should be tested for BBVs beforehand so you can make an informed decision about the risk.
- ❖ Extra-strong condoms are available for higher-risk sexual activities such as anal sex.
- ❖ If you snort drugs, we advise you not to use banknotes. Try to use your own straw and dispose of this after each use.
- ❖ If you inject drugs, try not to share equipment. This includes things like spoons, syringes, filters, and swabs. DHI offer a confidential needle exchange service where all these items can be obtained for free (please see below for further details).
- ❖ If you are using with other people, it may be helpful to use “Nevershare” needles which come in different colours to reduce the risk of using someone else’s needle by mistake.
- ❖ Smoking is less risky than injecting.
- ❖ It is important to safely dispose of any equipment you have used to take drugs. The safest option is a purpose-made bin which can be provided by a needle exchange service or pharmacy. These bins must be disposed of correctly in a clinical waste bin, which can be accessed at any of the needle exchange services listed below.
- ❖ If you have had unprotected sex or shared equipment, it is a good idea to get tested for BBVs. If an illness is caught early, it is generally easier to treat. It will also allow you to take steps to avoid passing it on to anyone else.

## **How we can help**

DHI offers free BBV testing to all our clients. This will be offered from the very first appointment. If you are concerned that you may be at risk, speak to your key-worker or call our triage team on 01454 868750 (Freephone 0800 073 3011).

The needle exchange service can be accessed from our Warmley Hub (130 Tower Road North), between 1pm and 3pm on Monday, Thursday and Friday. No appointment is required, and the service is completely confidential.

We are happy to provide a full range of equipment, and to safely dispose of anything you have already used. We can also provide advice on how to keep yourself as safe as possible if you choose to use drugs.

If you are unable to get to the Warmley Hub, a list of pharmacies providing a needle exchange service can be found overleaf. If it is difficult for you to get out of the house (for example if you have a long-term illness or mobility problem) we may be able to arrange a home visit from our outreach workers.

## Pharmacies in South Gloucestershire providing a needle exchange service

<p>Day Lewis PLC 13 Gloucester Road North Filton Park Bristol BS7 0SG</p> <p>0117 969 2317</p>	<p>Well Kingswood Kingswood Health Centre Alma Road Bristol BS15 4EJ</p> <p>0117 967 3384</p>
<p>Day Lewis Pharmacy 508 Filton Avenue Horfield Bristol BS7 0QE</p> <p>0117 969 0808</p>	<p>Lloyds Pharmacy The Parade Patchway Bristol BS34 5TF</p> <p>0117 969 2056</p>
<p>Shaunaks Pharmacy 123-125 High Street Hanham Bristol BS15 3QY</p> <p>0117 967 3327</p>	<p>Boots 98 High Street Staple Hill Bristol BS16 5HL</p> <p>0117 9566 488</p>
<p>Boots West Walk Primary Care Centre 21 West Walk Yate Bristol BS37 4AX</p> <p>01454 313688</p>	<p>Boots 1 School Road Cadbury Heath Bristol BS30 8EN</p> <p>0117 967 1192</p>
<p>Billings Pharmacy 5a Kingschase, Regent Street, Kingswood BS15 8LP</p> <p>0117 967 0061</p>	