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THE SOUTH AFRICAN  
DENTAL ASSOCIATION

*Patient Education  
Information  
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**Hepatitis  
Awareness  
Day**

## What is Hepatitis

Hepatitis is an inflammatory disorder of the liver. It is mostly caused by a viral infection, but there may also be other possible causes of hepatitis.

These may consist of autoimmune hepatitis and hepatitis that occurs as a secondary result of medications, drugs, toxins, and alcohol. Autoimmune hepatitis is a disease that occurs when your body's defence mechanism fights against your liver tissue.

The main viral subtypes of hepatitis include hepatitis A, B, C, D, and E, and each one is caused by a different virus.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has projected that throughout the world 354 million people are currently living with chronic hepatitis B and C. (Kahn, 2021)

## Causes of Hepatitis

Hepatitis A - Exposure to HAV in food or water

Hepatitis B - Contact with HBV in body fluids, such as blood, vaginal secretions, or semen

Hepatitis C - Contact with HCV in body fluids, such as blood, vaginal secretions, or semen

Hepatitis D - Contact with blood containing HDV

Hepatitis E - Exposure to HEV in food or water

Non-Infectious Causes

Alcohol and Other Toxins

Autoimmune response

## Signs and Symptoms

People living with chronic hepatitis B and C may not display any symptoms until late in the disease progression when it starts affecting the liver function. Contrary to this, those with acute hepatitis may display symptoms shortly after contracting a hepatitis virus.

## Symptoms

Fatigue, flu-like symptoms, dark urine, pale stool, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, unexplained weight loss, yellow skin and eyes, which may be signs of jaundice

## Hepatitis in the dental setting

Dental health care professionals are said to be at a risk of infections caused by various microorganisms including Mycobacterium tuberculosis, hepatitis B and hepatitis C viruses (HBV and HCV, respectively), streptococci, staphylococci, herpes simplex virus type 1, HIV, mumps, influenza, and rubella. HBV and HCV infections are the major causes of liver disease worldwide and the health policy makers with their strategies try to control these infections in the communities.

Many researchers believe that dentists acquire the virus through cuts in the fingers contaminated by the patient's blood or saliva. As nasopharyngeal secretions carry the virus, the possibility that infection may be acquired by aerosol, while remote, still exists. Dental

surgeons have a great risk of exposure to hepatitis when they use and dispose sharp instruments. Every health care specialty that involves contact with mucosa, blood, or blood contaminated with body fluids should have the goal of ensuring compliance with standard precautions and other methods to minimize infection risks.

Viral hepatitis has now become a quiet epidemic in the world. It is the major cause of liver cirrhosis and liver cancer. In many dental practices, infections can be accelerated through several ways, which include direct or indirect contact with blood, oral fluids, droplet splash, vaporizers. Oral health practitioners can play a huge role in preventing hepatitis by assuming each and every patient as a potential carrier of hepatitis. Therefore, following appropriate infection control protocols, proper sterilization of instruments and premises, and following prophylactic vaccination protocols in order to reduce the risk of hepatitis.

The aim of this information is to increase awareness amongst practitioners and thus reduce the burden of hepatitis in their communities. (Dahiya, 2015)

Your oral healthcare practitioner is available to discuss your treatment and concerns. Patients and/or caregivers should utilize this resource to ensure optimal treatment is possible.