

Blood tests

Everyone with hepatitis B needs regular monitoring and that includes six-monthly blood tests to check the health of their liver. But what tests should primary healthcare providers be doing and why?

Hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg):

Determines whether there is continued viral infection.

Alpha-fetoprotein (AFP)

This is a biomarker for liver cancer. It's vital primary healthcare providers request these six-monthly for all patients with continued viral infection (HBsAg-positive).

If results show an elevated AFP level, please seek advice from our clinicians.

Hepatitis B e-antigen (HBeAg):

This checks the status of infection. A positive result indicates the virus is in the more active form. The e-antigen is a protein from the hepatitis B virus that circulates in infected blood when the virus is actively replicating. Being HBeAg-positive means the patient is likely to have a high level of virus present and can spread it to other people.

Liver function tests (LFTs):

Check for active liver inflammation. Anti-viral medication may be considered depending on patient results.

Patients can have hepatitis B even if their LFTs are normal. If your patient has risk factors for hepatitis B, please screen them with the above tests.

If your patient's liver blood tests are abnormal and you want to see if hepatitis B could be the cause, the best test to do is the hepatitis B viral load (HBV DNA).