



HM GOVERNMENT OF GIBRALTAR

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PRESS RELEASE

No: 133/2014

Date: 26th March 2014

Government introduces Hepatitis B Occupational Vaccine

HM Government of Gibraltar has introduced a new service to provide occupational vaccination for Hepatitis B to key workers in the public service.

Hepatitis B is an infectious disease caused by a virus of the same name. It damages the liver, producing jaundice, and the outcome of this can vary between cure, long-term liver damage and death. Even after cure, people continue to harbour the virus in their blood for years and can infect other persons. Hepatitis B is transmitted from person to person through contact with blood or body fluids and sexual contact.

Healthcare workers are particularly at risk of getting infected as they can regularly come in contact with infected persons, handle sharp objects like needles and carry out high-risk procedures. A healthcare worker who carries the virus could pass on the disease and this is particularly a risk for vulnerable patients, such as elderly people or patients with leukaemia and cancer.

Hepatitis B can be prevented by vaccination. The vaccine is extremely effective, with very few side effects, and generally results in lifelong protection.

Such protection is not only good medical practice, but it is also the law. Employers across Europe are required to provide a safe environment for their employees and this includes protecting them from preventable infections.

A clinic has been set up at St Bernard's Hospital which will provide this long overdue service, long called for by unions and professionals. Staff covered by the programme will include all GHA staff, Prison staff, Royal Gibraltar Police officers, Customs officers, the Fire Service, Care Agency employees, and Sewer Section staff.

Minister for Health Dr John Cortes, who is himself vaccinated against Hepatitis B, commented, "This is a very significant and hugely overdue step in promoting the well being and health of the community and the public service. It will protect workers in key areas and clearly demonstrates the Government's commitment both to improving the health of the community and to fulfilling its responsibilities as a good and modern employer."

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