

# Doctors' Voice

July/August 2013

## Changes to after-hours service

From the 1st July some general practices in the Geelong region will have changes in the after-hours services they provide. Please speak to the practice staff at your general practice for information about how the after-hours services may have changed. For local after-hours service information please visit [www.docgeelong.com](http://www.docgeelong.com)

## Gum disease

Gum disease affects most people at some time during their life. It is usually caused by a build-up of plaque on teeth. One of the common signs of gum disease is bleeding gums. Careful and regular cleaning of your teeth and gums each day can help prevent gum disease. Getting treatment for dental problems early can help save teeth that are at risk from gum disease and other conditions. See your dentist or oral health professional if you have swollen or bleeding gums or teeth.

### The different stages of gum disease

There are two main stages of gum disease:

- Gingivitis
- Periodontitis

### Gingivitis

Gingivitis is early gum disease and occurs when dental plaque builds up on teeth, particularly where the gum joins the tooth. The signs of gingivitis are bleeding, redness and swelling of the gum.

### Periodontitis

Periodontitis is an advanced gum disease that may occur if gingivitis is not treated. The gum margin - the part of the gum that seals to the tooth - is weakened and spaces form between the tooth and the gum. These spaces are called 'periodontal pockets.' Bacteria and their products become trapped in these pockets causing further inflammation (redness and swelling).

The structures affected by periodontitis include the covering of the tooth root (cementum), the bone and the fibres that connect the cementum to the bone (periodontal ligament). As the disease progresses and bone is lost, larger spaces begin to form between the tooth and the gum. Signs of periodontitis include bleeding, swelling and receding gums together with bad breath, a bad taste in the mouth and loose teeth.

### Cleaning teeth can help prevent gum disease

You should clean your teeth carefully every day with a soft, small-headed toothbrush, (Continued next column)

(From previous page)

especially along the gum line where the gum meets the tooth. This ensures the gum tissue and supporting structures remain healthy. The careful use of dental floss between teeth also assists in removal of plaque. While it is tempting to avoid cleaning your gums when they are inflamed and bleeding, brushing will help improve the situation.

### Seek dental care

Like many conditions, early intervention to treat gum disease can ensure the longevity of your teeth. If you have swollen or bleeding gums or your teeth feel loose, see your dentist or oral health professional.

Your gums will be examined with a probe to measure the spaces between the tooth and gum. This will determine the health of your gums and supporting structures. If necessary, the dentist or oral health professional will instruct you in tooth cleaning techniques or may clean your teeth professionally to remove any plaque and calculus (hardened plaque).

In an emergency, (if you have swelling of the face, severe bleeding or injury as a result of an accident), it is important to seek treatment immediately from a dental hospital, community dental clinic or the emergency department of your nearest hospital.

### Things to remember

- Gum disease affects most people at some stage in their life
- The two stages of gum disease are gingivitis and periodontitis
- Careful and regular cleaning can help prevent gum disease
- Getting treatment early can help save teeth that are at risk from gum disease – see your dentist or oral health professional if you have swollen or bleeding gums or loose teeth. Ref: [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

# Doctors' Voice

## Check your immunisation halo

The immunisations you may need are decided by your health, age, lifestyle and occupation. Together, these factors are referred to as HALO.

HALO is defined as:

**Health** – some health conditions or factors may make you more vulnerable to vaccine-preventable diseases. For example, premature birth, asthma, diabetes, heart, lung, spleen or kidney conditions, Down syndrome and HIV will mean you may benefit from additional or more frequent immunisations.

**Age** – at different ages you need protection from different vaccine-preventable diseases. Australia's National Immunisation Program sets out recommended immunisations for babies, children, older people and other people at risk, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Most recommended vaccines are available at no cost to these groups.

**Lifestyle** – lifestyle choices can have an impact on your immunisation needs. Travelling overseas to certain locations, planning a family, sexual activity, smoking, and playing contact sport that may expose you directly to someone else's blood, will mean you may benefit from additional or more frequent immunisations.

**Occupation** – you are likely to require additional or more frequent immunisations if you work in an occupation that exposes you to vaccine-preventable diseases or puts you into contact with people who are more susceptible to problems from vaccine-preventable diseases such as babies or young children, pregnant women, the elderly, and people with chronic or acute health conditions. Workers in aged care, childcare, healthcare, emergency service or sewerage repair and maintenance need to discuss their immunisation needs with their doctor. Some employers help with the cost of relevant immunisations for their employees.

Talk to your doctor or practice nurse if you think you or someone in your care has health, age, lifestyle or occupation factors that could mean immunisation is necessary.

## Drug Overdose

An overdose is when a toxic (poisonous) amount of a drug or poison is taken. Death may be instant or may follow more slowly if organs are permanently damaged. Always call 000 if a drug overdose is known or suspected.

If you have any ideas for topics, please speak to your GP or Practice Nurse

## Hepatitis C: Going Viral program

This year Hepatitis Victoria has been running an online group program for people with hepatitis C – *Hep C: Going Viral*. The course is an online (computer-based) program and is for people with hepatitis C or a history of hep C. The program is based on successful face-to-face groups – *Hep C: Take Control*, which have been running since 2009. Previous *Take Control* participants are welcome to be part of the online group.

*Hep C: Going Viral* is a 6 week course, with a 1.5 hours total time commitment each week. The course consists of an hour-long online chat session (typed) plus self-directed learning modules that are tailored to the needs and interest of individual participants. Each module takes around 30 minutes per week to complete. Only a computer with internet access is required – no special microphones, speaker or cameras.

If you would like to be part of the group, or would just like some more information, please contact Louisa Walsh on [Louisa@hepvic.org.au](mailto:Louisa@hepvic.org.au) or on the Hepatitis Infoline 1800 703 003.

## Health Assessment for people aged 45 to 49 years

A health check is available for people aged between 45 to 49 years who may be at risk of developing a chronic health complaint such as diabetes or heart problems. This health check gives you and your doctor the opportunity to look at your lifestyle and medical/family history to find out what risk factors you may have.

A plan can then be put in place to manage these and lessen the likelihood of you going on to develop chronic disease. If you would like a health check make an appointment today to discuss this with your doctor or practice nurse.