

Direct-acting antiviral agents for treating chronic hepatitis C

WHAT DOES THE GUIDANCE SAY?

Sofosbuvir/velpatasvir and glecaprevir/pibrentasvir are recommended for listing on the Medication Assistance Fund (MAF) for government subsidy for adults with chronic hepatitis C who have not received treatment before, or who have had certain treatments previously, but still have the infection.

WHAT IS CHRONIC HEPATITIS C?

Chronic hepatitis C is a disease of the liver caused by the hepatitis C virus. There are 6 different types of the virus (called genotypes, 1 to 6). Most people are infected by a single genotype.

Some people with hepatitis C infection recover quickly without treatment, but most people develop a long-lasting infection. It can damage the liver over time, causing scarring (cirrhosis). In compensated cirrhosis, the liver is able to work well enough despite the damage. In decompensated cirrhosis, the liver stops working properly.

WHAT ARE DIRECT-ACTING ANTIVIRAL AGENTS (DAA)?

You may know sofosbuvir/velpatasvir as Epclusa, and glecaprevir/pibrentasvir as Maviret. They are part of a group of drugs called direct-acting antiviral agents (DAA) and can treat chronic hepatitis C caused by all genotypes (1 to 6).

They work by stopping the hepatitis C virus from making copies of itself and allowing your immune system to clear the virus out of your body. They can get rid of the virus in people who have never had treatment or who have had different treatments before that didn't clear the virus.

HOW MUCH CAN I TAKE?

You will usually need to take one tablet of sofosbuvir/velpatasvir each day for 12 weeks. Some people with genotype 3 virus, or those who have advanced (decompensated) cirrhosis will need to also have another drug called ribavirin, twice daily.

You will usually need to take three tablets of glecaprevir/pibrentasvir each day. You may need to take it for 8 to 16 weeks depending on the genotype, any previous treatment you have received, and your liver function. Your doctor will do tests to see if your body has cleared the virus after the treatment course is completed.

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WHO CAN HAVE A DAA?

Adults can apply for sofosbuvir/velpatasvir or glecaprevir/pibrentasvir through the MAF if they have chronic hepatitis C, with or without cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), caused by any genotype (1 to 6). Either can be prescribed for patients who have never had any treatment before for their condition, or for those who have had certain treatments before that did not clear the virus.

WHY WERE THEY RECOMMENDED FOR SUBSIDY?

ACE evaluates how well a treatment works in relation to how much it costs compared to other treatments. Sofosbuvir/velpatasvir and glecaprevir/pibrentasvir were recommended for subsidy because their benefits in curing patients from the hepatitis virus justify their cost.

WHAT DOES LISTING ON THE MAF MEAN FOR ME?

The MAF helps people pay for expensive treatments that are clinically necessary. If your doctor prescribes sofosbuvir/velpatasvir or glecaprevir/pibrentasvir for your chronic hepatitis C, and you meet the MAF criteria, your treatment cost will be subsidised by 40% to 75%.

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ACE is the national health technology assessment agency under the Ministry of Health (Singapore). It publishes guidances on diagnosing, treating, and preventing different medical conditions based on the latest research information available worldwide.

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