



## Hepatitis B testing coverage at Vila Central Hospital laboratory among pregnant women attending antenatal clinics, Efate, 2018 – 2021

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### Abstract text

**Background:** Hepatitis B is transmitted through contact with blood or other body fluids, with mother-to-child transmission the most common route of transmission. Vanuatu policy includes hepatitis B screening in the first antenatal care visit (ANC-1). This study aims to assess hepatitis B screening and percentage positive among women seeking antenatal services on Efate.

**Methods:** This was a cross-sectional study using routinely collected administrative data. Outcome measures were (1) pregnant women presenting for ANC-1 and had a hepatitis B screening test at VCH laboratory. (2) Pregnant women presenting for ANC-1 that were hepatitis B positive. Data for 2018 to 2021 were included; data for 2022 were obtained but not included due to validity issues.

**Results:** The annual number of ANC-1 visits on Efate remained stable between 3200 to 3400 from 2018 to 2021, with an average of 3370 per year. The screening coverage decreased from 86% in 2019 to 81% in 2021. VCH-ANC provides approximately 70% of all ANC-1 care, whilst other sites contributed less than 30% of the total ANC-1 visits. The total number of HBsAg screening tests performed for ANC-1 pregnant women between 2018 and 2021 was 10,868, from which 706 were reactive (6%). Yearly, percentage positive remained stable at 7% between 2018 and 2020, and in 2021 decreased to 5%.

**Discussion:** In 2021 testing coverage reduced by 6%. In 2022 the number of pregnant women screened for hepatitis B also decreased. This decrease is due to the introduction of the decentralisation policy, which included decentralization of ANC-1 services to community health facilities. Laboratory services were not decentralized, which may have influenced access to hepatitis B testing. The decrease in positivity is most likely due to vaccine-derived immunity. It is recommended that hepatitis B screening is also decentralised to community-based health facilities.