

Hepatitis B Fact Sheet

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a liver disease caused by a virus. It can cause jaundice (a yellowing of the skin and eyes), fatigue, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, and joint pain. However, **30% of those infected will not have any symptoms**. Symptoms are less common in children.

How is Hepatitis B spread?

- When blood or body fluids from an infected person enters the body of a person who is not immune.
- Hepatitis B can be spread through having sex with an infected person without using a condom (the effectiveness of latex condoms in preventing infection with HBV is unknown, but their proper use may reduce transmission)
- Sharing drugs, needles, or "works" when "shooting" drugs
- Needlesticks or sharps exposures on the job
- From an infected mother to her baby during birth

How can a person prevent this illness?

- **Hepatitis B vaccine is the best protection.** It has been available since 1982 and has been shown to be safe when administered to both adults and children.
- If you are having sex, but not with one steady partner, use latex condoms correctly and every time you have sex.
- If you are pregnant, you should get a blood test for hepatitis B. Infants born to infected mothers should be given hepatitis B immune globulin and vaccine within 12 hours after birth. **90% of babies infected at birth will become carriers of hepatitis for the rest of their lives. They are at high risk for liver disease.**
- Do not shoot drugs; if you shoot drugs, stop and get into a treatment program; if you can't stop, never share drugs, needles, syringes, water, or "works", and get vaccinated against hepatitis A and B.
- Do not share personal care items that might have blood on them (razors, toothbrushes).
- Consider the risks if you are thinking about getting a tattoo or body piercing. You might get infected if the tools have someone else's blood on them or if the artist or piercer does not follow good health practices.
- If you have or had hepatitis B, do not donate blood, organs, or tissue.
- If you are a health care or public safety worker, get vaccinated against hepatitis B, and always follow routine precautions and safely handle needles and other sharp instruments.

Who is Most at Risk of Infection?

- Persons with multiple sex partners or a diagnosis of a sexually transmitted disease
- Men who have sex with men
- Sex contacts of infected persons

- Injection drug users
- Household contacts of chronically infected persons
- **Infants born to infected mothers**
- Children of immigrants from countries with high rates of hepatitis B infection
- Health care and public safety workers
- Dialysis patients

*Persons at risk for HBV infection might also be at risk for infection with hepatitis C virus or HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.

Vaccine Recommendations

- All babies, at birth
- All children 0-18 years of age who have not been vaccinated
- People of any age whose behavior or job puts them at high risk for HBV infection (see above)



How are Hepatitis B infections diagnosed and treated?

A blood test can detect the presence of hepatitis B virus in the body. Infected persons should be evaluated by their doctor for liver disease. There are four drugs for the treatment of persons with chronic hepatitis B. These drugs should not be used by pregnant women. Drinking alcohol can make liver disease worse.

Are there long term consequences to a Hepatitis B infection?

Yes! Chronic (long term) infection occurs in:

- 90% of infants infected at birth
- 30% of children infected at age 1 - 5 years
- 6% of persons infected after age 5 years

Death from chronic liver disease occurs in:

- 15-25% of chronically infected persons

For more information please visit: www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/index