

# **Hepatitis B**

## **What is hepatitis B?**

Hepatitis B is a contagious liver disease caused by the hepatitis B virus. It can cause either "acute" or "chronic" illness. Acute hepatitis B is a newly acquired infection that causes illness within six months or less of exposure to the hepatitis B virus. Chronic hepatitis B results from the hepatitis B virus remaining in the body for six months or more. Chronic hepatitis B infection can cause long-term illness including cirrhosis and liver cancer.

## **How is hepatitis B spread (transmitted)?**

Transmission occurs when blood or body fluids from an infected person enters the body of an uninfected or unvaccinated person. Hepatitis B can be spread through sexual activity, sharing needles or "works" when "shooting" drugs, through workplace needle sticks or sharps injuries, or from an infected mother to her baby during birth. Hepatitis B is not spread through kissing, hugging, breastfeeding, sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses, coughing, sneezing, food, water, or casual contact.

## **What are the signs and symptoms?**

About 30-50% of persons over age 5 have initial signs or symptoms. Signs and symptoms are less common in children than adults. Some people experience abdominal pain, loss of appetite, fatigue, nausea and vomiting, dark urine, joint pain and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes).

## **How soon do symptoms appear?**

Symptoms begin an average of 90 days (range: 60–150 days) after infection with hepatitis B.

## **What are the long-term effects?**

If the virus is not cleared during the acute phase, chronic infection may lead to liver disease including liver cancer. Chronic infection occurs in 90% of infants infected at birth, 25-50% of children infected

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at age 1-5, and in 5% of persons infected after 5 years of age. Death from chronic liver disease or liver cancer occurs in 15-25% of chronically infected people.

## **How long is a person able to spread hepatitis B?**

Hepatitis B is present before symptoms appear and while symptoms are present. Persons with the hepatitis B virus in their blood can spread hepatitis B to others. Chronic hepatitis B persons with the virus in their blood carry the virus indefinitely.

## **If I clear the virus, can I become re-infected?**

No. If you have cleared the virus during the acute infection stage, your body produces protective antibodies that will not allow you to contract the virus again.

## **How is hepatitis B diagnosed?**

Only doctors can diagnose hepatitis B. Diagnosis is based on a laboratory test for hepatitis B. (See Interpretation of the Hepatitis B Panel:

<http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HBV/PDFs/SerologicChartv8.pdf>)

## **What is the treatment and medical management for hepatitis B?**

People with hepatitis B need to be evaluated by their doctor for liver disease. Goals of treatment consist of eliminating hepatitis B virus from the body or suppressing replication of the virus to limit damage to the liver and prevent the spread of the disease to others.

## **How can the risk of chronic liver disease be reduced among people chronically infected with hepatitis B?**

See your doctor regularly. Additional tests may be needed to check to see if you have liver damage. Do not drink alcohol. Check with your doctor before taking any medications, even over-the-counter and herbal medicines may be toxic to your liver. You may need to get vaccinated against hepatitis A.

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## How can hepatitis B be prevented?

Hepatitis B vaccine is the best protection. All children 0-18 should be vaccinated plus adults in high-risk groups (injection drug users, men who have sex with men, sex or household contacts of a chronically infected person, health care and public safety workers, people seeking treatment for a sexually transmitted disease, unvaccinated adults with diabetes mellitus who are aged 19 through 59 years, people with chronic liver disease, travelers to regions with intermediate or high rates of endemic HBV infection, people with HIV infection, residents and staff of facilities for developmentally disabled persons, and hemodialysis patients).

## People with hepatitis B should remain aware that their blood and some other body fluids contain the virus.

- Use of condoms may help reduce the chance of hepatitis B transmission during sex.
- Pregnant women should be tested for hepatitis B. Infants born to hepatitis B-infected mothers should receive hepatitis B immune globulin and vaccine within 12 hours after birth to prevent infection.
- Do not inject drugs. If you do, get vaccinated and never share needles or works.
- Do not share toothbrushes, razors, or other personal care items.
- If you are a health care worker, get vaccinated against hepatitis B. Always follow barrier precautions.
- If you have or had hepatitis B, do not donate blood, organs, or tissues.

*If you think that you may have this infection, or have questions about the disease described above, you should consult your health care provider.*

For additional information on this disease, visit the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](https://www.cdc.gov) website.

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