

HEPATITIS B

General Information



Who is at risk?

Although anyone can get hepatitis B, some people are at greater risk, such as those who:

- Have sexual contact with an infected person
- Have multiple sex partners
- Have a sexually transmitted disease
- Are men who have sexual contact with other men
- Inject drugs or share needles, syringes, or other drug equipment
- Live with a person who has chronic hepatitis B
- Are infants born to infected mothers
- Are exposed to blood on the job
- Are hemodialysis patients

What is hepatitis?

“Hepatitis” means inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis is most often caused by one of several viruses, such as hepatitis A virus, hepatitis B virus, or hepatitis C virus. Toxins, bacterial infections, certain drugs, other diseases, and heavy alcohol use can also cause hepatitis.

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a contagious liver disease that results from infection with the hepatitis B virus. It can range in severity from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a serious, lifelong illness. Hepatitis B can be either “acute” or “chronic”.

Acute hepatitis B virus infection is a short-term illness that occurs within the first 6 months after someone is exposed to the hepatitis B virus. Acute infection can — but does not always — lead to chronic infection.

Chronic hepatitis B virus infection is a long-term illness that occurs when the hepatitis B virus remains in a person’s body.

The best way to prevent hepatitis B is by getting vaccinated.

How common is hepatitis B in the United States?

The number of acute hepatitis B virus infections has been declining each year, with an estimated 46,000 new infections in 2006. Many experts believe this decline is a result of widespread vaccination of children. However, up to 1.4 million people may have chronic hepatitis B, many of whom are unaware of their infection.

How is hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B is usually spread when blood, semen, or another body fluid from a person infected with the hepatitis B virus enters the body of someone who is not infected. This can happen through sexual contact with an infected person or sharing needles, syringes, or other drug-injection equipment. Hepatitis B can also be passed from an infected mother to her baby at birth.

Hepatitis B is not spread through breastfeeding, sharing eating utensils, hugging, kissing, holding hands, coughing, or sneezing. Unlike some forms of hepatitis, hepatitis B is not spread by contaminated food or water.



Can hepatitis B be spread through sex?

Yes. In the United States, hepatitis B is most commonly spread through sexual contact. The hepatitis B virus is 50–100 times more infectious than HIV and can be passed through the exchange of body fluids, such as semen, vaginal fluids, and blood.



Who should get vaccinated against hepatitis B?

- Anyone having sex with an infected partner
- People with multiple sex partners
- Anyone with a sexually transmitted disease
- Men who have sexual contact with other men
- Users of injection drugs
- People who live with someone who is infected
- People with chronic liver disease, end stage renal disease, or HIV infection
- Healthcare and public safety workers exposed to blood
- Residents or staff of facilities for developmentally disabled persons
- Travelers to certain countries
- Infants or children younger than 19 who have not been vaccinated
- Anyone who wants to be protected from hepatitis B

For more information

Talk to your health professional, call your health department, or visit www.cdc.gov/hepatitis

What are the symptoms of acute hepatitis B?

Not everyone has symptoms with acute hepatitis B, especially young children. Most adults have symptoms that appear within 3 months of exposure. Symptoms can last from a few weeks to several months and include:

- Fever
- Nausea
- Clay-colored bowel movements
- Fatigue
- Vomiting
- Joint pain
- Loss of appetite
- Abdominal pain
- Jaundice
- Dark urine

What are the symptoms of chronic hepatitis B?

Many people with chronic hepatitis B remain symptom free for up to 30 years, but others experience ongoing symptoms similar to those of acute hepatitis B. Chronic hepatitis B is a serious disease that can result in long-term health problems.

How is hepatitis B diagnosed and treated?

Doctors diagnose the infection using one or more blood tests. There is no medication available to treat acute hepatitis B, so doctors usually recommend rest, adequate nutrition, and fluids. People with chronic hepatitis B virus infection should be monitored regularly for signs of liver disease, and some people benefit from treatment with specific medications.

How serious is chronic hepatitis B?

Over time, approximately 15%–25% of people with chronic hepatitis B develop serious liver problems, including liver damage, cirrhosis, liver failure and liver cancer. Every year, up to 4,000 people in the United States and more than 600,000 people worldwide die from hepatitis B-related liver disease.

Can hepatitis B be prevented?

Yes. The best way to prevent hepatitis B is by getting vaccinated. For adults, the hepatitis B vaccine series is usually given as 3 shots during a 6-month period. The entire series is needed for long-term protection. However, once a person has been infected with the hepatitis B virus, the vaccine does not provide protection against the disease.



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Division of Viral Hepatitis

www.cdc.gov/hepatitis



South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control
We promote and protect the health of the public and the environment.
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For information, call the S.C. AIDS/STD Hotline at 1-800-322-AIDS (2437)

