

CHRONIC HEPATITIS B

Information on Testing



Who should be tested for hepatitis B?

Testing for hepatitis B is recommended for certain groups of people, including:

- People born in Asia, Africa and other regions with moderate or high rates of hepatitis B (See map)
- Unvaccinated people whose parents are from regions with high rates of hepatitis B (See map)
- Anyone having sex with a person infected with hepatitis B
- People who live with someone who is infected
- Men who have sexual contact with other men
- Injection drug users
- All pregnant women
- People with HIV or AIDS
- Persons with selected medical conditions who receive immunosuppressive therapy (hemodialysis or chemotherapy)

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a contagious liver disease that results from infection with the hepatitis B virus. Some people get infected with hepatitis B and develop an acute, or short-term, illness, while others develop a chronic, or long-term, illness.

How is hepatitis B spread?

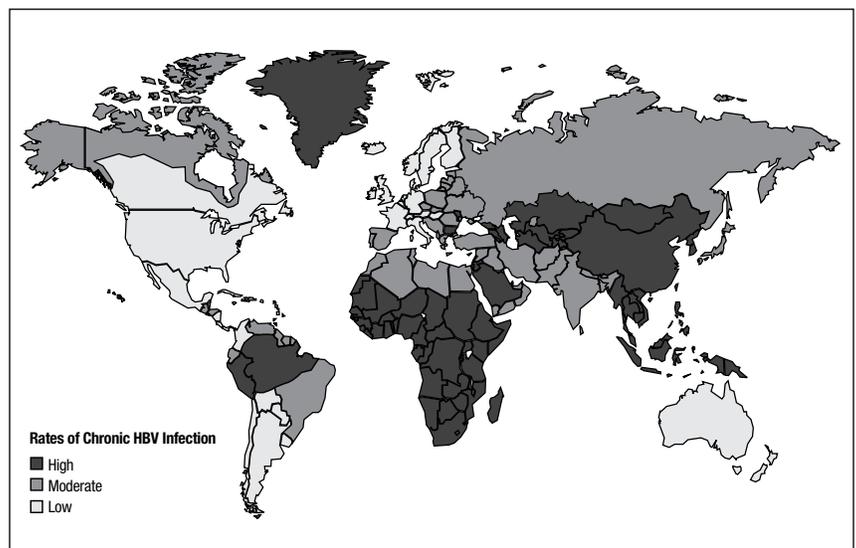
Hepatitis B is usually spread when blood, semen, or another body fluid from a person infected with the hepatitis B virus enters the body of someone who is not infected. This can happen through direct contact with the blood or open sores of an infected person; having sex with an infected partner; an infected mother passing it to her baby at birth; or sharing needles, syringes, or other drug-injection equipment.

Up to 1.4 million people in the United States and 350 million people worldwide may have chronic hepatitis B. Most are unaware of their infection.

Why is chronic hepatitis B so common?

As shown in the map below, chronic hepatitis B is very common. Worldwide, most people with chronic hepatitis B were infected with the virus at birth or during early childhood. Many of those infected are unaware that they have chronic hepatitis B, especially since they have no symptoms. As a result, they can spread the disease to others, including people they live with, sexual partners, and — for women — their newborns.

Worldwide Rates of Chronic Hepatitis B Virus Infection





How is chronic hepatitis B diagnosed?

Doctors use one or more blood tests to diagnose hepatitis B virus infection. If this test is negative, a person does not have chronic hepatitis B. If the test is positive, additional blood tests are needed to determine whether or not a person has chronic infection.

How is chronic hepatitis B treated?

People with chronic infection should see a doctor experienced in treating hepatitis B. He or she can determine the most appropriate medical care. People need to be monitored on a regular basis, and some will benefit from medication. Several new drugs are available which can delay or reverse the effects of liver disease.

For more information

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

What are the benefits of getting tested for chronic hepatitis B?

Testing is the best way to determine whether or not a person has chronic infection. Many people with chronic hepatitis B don't know they are infected since they don't look or feel sick.

Learning if one is infected is key to diagnosing hepatitis B early and getting appropriate medical care. In addition, testing can identify at-risk household members and sexual partners so they can be tested, and if uninfected, vaccinated to protect them from getting hepatitis B.

What are the symptoms of chronic hepatitis B?

Many people with chronic hepatitis B remain symptom free for up to 30 years. Some people experience symptoms similar to those of acute hepatitis B infection, including fever, fatigue, abdominal pain, and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes).

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, or 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.

What can people infected with hepatitis B do to take care of their liver?

People with chronic hepatitis B virus infection should see a doctor regularly. They also should ask their health professional before taking any prescription pills or over-the-counter medications — including herbal supplements or vitamins — as they can potentially damage the liver. Alcohol should also be avoided, since it can accelerate liver damage.

Can hepatitis B be prevented?

Yes. The best way to prevent hepatitis B is by getting vaccinated. For adults, the hepatitis B vaccine is usually given as a 3-shot series during a 6-month period. It is recommended for uninfected sexual partners and household members of anyone infected with hepatitis B, as well as for people with certain risk factors and medical conditions. Once a person has been infected with the hepatitis B virus, however, 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.
www.scdhec.gov

For information, call the S.C. AIDS/STD Hotline at 1-800-322-AIDS (2437)

