

Hepatitis B General Information

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is an infection of the liver caused by a virus. The virus is in the blood, semen and vaginal fluids of a person with hepatitis B.

How is it spread?

The hepatitis B virus can be spread during sex, by sharing needles to inject drugs, or by getting blood or other infected body fluids in a mucous membrane (mouth or eyes) or on broken skin. It may be sexually transmitted through genital or anal contact with an infected person.

The virus also can be passed from mother to baby, usually at the time of birth.

The virus is in the body for several weeks before symptoms start until several months after.

The virus is not spread by casual contact such as:

- hugging
- kissing
- sneezing
- coughing

The virus is not found in food or water.

What are the symptoms?

A blood test is needed for the diagnosis of hepatitis B.

Up to 50% of adults and 90% of children who have hepatitis B have no symptoms.

Of adults who get hepatitis B, 1-10 % will go on to carry the virus for the rest of their lives.

Symptoms may include:

- tiredness
- loss of appetite
- fever
- vomiting
- yellow skin and eyes [jaundice]
- urine dark in colour, stool light in colour

What is the treatment?

People with hepatitis B need rest and a healthy diet. Some people will be hospitalized, and some will require medication prescribed by their healthcare provider. Alcohol should be avoided. Talk to your healthcare provider before taking any over-the-counter medications.

How can you prevent hepatitis B?

- The best way to prevent hepatitis B is to get vaccinated
- Practice safer sex
- Do not share needles, razors, toothbrushes, sexual toys, etc.
- Clean blood spills appropriately. Wear gloves. Soak up the blood with paper towels, and then dispose of them in a sealed plastic bag. Clean the soiled surface with detergent and water, and then disinfect it with a fresh solution of one part bleach (100 mL) to nine parts water (900 mL). Allow this solution to stay on the surface for 10 minutes before wiping it off.
- Check with your healthcare provider to see if you are at high risk of contracting hepatitis B and if you should receive hepatitis B vaccination (e.g., healthcare worker, traveller, multiple sexual partners).
- Use only professional tattoo and body piercing artists working in legitimate, reputable salons.
- People with the hepatitis B virus should tell all of their sexual partners that they are infected.
- All sexual partners and household contacts of those who carry hepatitis B should be vaccinated. All persons who have been exposed to hepatitis B should contact their healthcare provider.

For more information, talk to your healthcare provider or your local Public Health office.