



Hepatitis B Fact Sheet

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a virus that enters the bloodstream and then infects the liver.

How is the virus spread?

Hepatitis B is most often spread from person to person through contact with infected semen, vaginal secretions or blood. Having sex with an infected person and sharing drugs, needles, or “works” are common ways that people become infected. Babies born to infected mothers and persons who get a needlestick or other sharp exposure on the job are also at risk.

What happens after a person is exposed to hepatitis B?

After a person is exposed to hepatitis B, several things may happen: he/she may not become infected; he/she may become infected but not get sick; or he/she may become infected and get sick.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may be mild or they may be very severe. Symptoms include being very tired, nausea, vomiting, fever, stomach pain, and yellowing of the skin and eyes. *Remember*, about 30% of people infected with hepatitis B do not develop symptoms and may not know they are infected.

How soon do the symptoms appear?

It takes anywhere from two to six months after exposure before the symptoms of infection appear.

How long can an infected person spread the virus?

Most adults with hepatitis B will get rid of the virus within four to six months. They will no longer be capable of giving the infection to others and they can never get it again. However, about one out of every ten infected adults, and as many as nine out of ten babies will become chronically infected with hepatitis B, which means they do not get rid of the virus. Most chronically infected persons do not look or feel sick. However, they may eventually develop serious liver diseases such as cirrhosis (scarring) or liver cancer. *Even though chronically infected persons may feel healthy, they can still spread the hepatitis B virus to other people.*

Who is at risk?

- Persons with multiple sex partners or 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
- Infants/children of immigrants from areas with high rates of HBV infection
- Health care and public safety workers who have blood exposures
- Hemodialysis patients

How can infection with hepatitis B be prevented?

Hepatitis B vaccine has been available since 1982. All children from 0-18 years of age and persons at risk regardless of age should be vaccinated. 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 HBV-infected mothers should be given HBIG (hepatitis B immune globulin) and vaccine within 12 hours after birth. Do not inject drugs; if you inject 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.

What is the treatment for hepatitis B?

Adefovir dipivoxil, interferon alfa-2b, pegylated interferon alfa-2a, lamivudine, and entecavir are five drugs used for the treatment of chronic hepatitis B. These drugs should not be used by pregnant women.

If you are infected, what can you do to take care of yourself?

- Avoid alcoholic beverages and street drugs. They will damage your liver.
- Avoid taking prescription or over-the-counter medicines unless your doctor tells you it is ok.
- Eat a healthy diet and get enough rest.
- See a physician regularly.
- Get regular exercise and develop a stress reduction plan.
- If you become pregnant, tell your doctor you have hepatitis B. It is important that your baby is started on hepatitis B shots immediately at birth to prevent the baby from getting hepatitis B.

What can you do to protect others?

- Cover all cuts and sores with a bandage and wash hands well after touching blood or body fluids.
- Throw away any items that have your blood on them, such as bandages and menstrual pads, in plastic bags and close tightly.
- Clean up blood spills with paper towels. Then reclean the area with a bleach solution (1 part bleach to 10 parts water).
- Tell your sex partner that you have hepatitis B and use a condom until that person has been tested and, if necessary, vaccinated against hepatitis B.
- Ask your sex partners and all those who live in your household to see a doctor for testing and for hepatitis B vaccination.
- Do not share chewing gum, toothbrushes, razors, scissors, needles for ear piercing, nail files, or anything else that may come in contact with your blood or body fluids.
- Do not share syringes and needles.
- Do not donate blood, plasma, body organs, sperm or breast milk.