

# Facts About Hepatitis B for Adults

## What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a serious liver disease caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). The virus can affect people of all ages. Once infected, some people are never able to rid themselves of the virus. This long-term or “chronic” HBV infection can lead to liver cirrhosis, liver cancer and death. The virus is found in the blood and body fluids of infected people and is most often spread among adults through sexual contact or by sharing needles and other drug paraphernalia with an infected person. HBV can also be spread through normal household contact with HBV-infected persons, or by passage of the virus from an HBV-infected mother to her infant during birth.

## Symptoms

Hepatitis B can often be a “silent disease” that affects people without making them feel sick; this is more common among children. People who do get sick from hepatitis B might experience loss of appetite, tiredness, stomachache, nausea and vomiting. They might also experience yellowing of the whites of the eyes (jaundice) and/or joint pain. People with chronic HBV infection usually do not feel sick for many years, but will have symptoms if they develop the most serious complications from hepatitis B, like cirrhosis or liver cancer.

## Treatment

There is no specific treatment for newly acquired HBV infection. Medicines are available to treat people with chronic hepatitis B. These medicines work for some people, but not for all.

## Prevention

Safe, effective hepatitis B vaccines are available. The vaccines are used to protect everyone from newborn babies to older adults. The vaccination series is usually given as three doses over a six-month period. However, more flexible schedules can be used. Hepatitis B vaccine is recognized as the first anti-cancer vaccine because it can prevent liver cancer caused by chronic HBV infection.

## Who should get hepatitis B vaccine?

- ◆ **All children and adolescents from birth through 18 years of age.**
- ◆ **Persons at risk of sexual HBV transmission:** men and women who have had more than one sex partner during the previous six months or who have had a recently acquired sexually transmitted disease (STD); men who have sex with men; and persons receiving treatment for STDs, and persons with HIV infection.
- ◆ **Persons at risk of HBV transmission by percutaneous or mucosal exposure to blood:** people whose jobs potentially expose them to human blood or blood-contaminated body fluids, including most healthcare workers and some public safety workers; injection drug users; and persons with end-stage kidney disease.
- ◆ **People living with or having sexual contact with a person who has chronic HBV infection.**
- ◆ **Travelers who live or work for at least six months in areas where HBV infection is of high or intermediate endemicity, or who stay for shorter periods and will likely have contact with blood (e.g., in a medical setting) or sexual contact with local persons.**
- ◆ **Inmates of correctional facilities, including all inmates who receive a medical evaluation in federal and state prisons, jails, and juvenile correction facilities.**
- ◆ **Residents and staff of institutions and nonresidential daycare facilities for developmentally disabled persons.**
- ◆ **People with chronic liver disease including hepatitis C.**
- ◆ **All adults requesting protection from HBV infection.**

*Settings where hepatitis B vaccination is recommended for all adults*

- STD treatment facilities
- HIV testing and treatment facilities
- Facilities providing drug-abuse treatment and prevention services
- Healthcare settings targeting services to injection-drug users or men who have sex with men
- Correctional facilities
- End-stage renal disease programs and facilities for chronic hemodialysis patients
- Institutions and residential daycare facilities for persons with developmental disabilities

# Facts About Hepatitis B for Adults

- FACT:** Hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection can be prevented with a safe and effective vaccine.
- FACT:** You cannot get hepatitis B from the hepatitis B vaccine.
- FACT:** During the 1970s and 1980s, 200,000 to 300,000 persons were infected with HBV each year in the United States.
- FACT:** Hepatitis B incidence has declined substantially since 1991 when a strategy to eliminate HBV transmission through immunization began to be implemented. The decline in incidence has been greatest among children and adolescents, who are recommended to be routinely vaccinated against hepatitis B.
- FACT:** In 2007, rates of new cases of acute hepatitis B were highest among adults aged 30 – 44 years of age.
- FACT:** More than 50% of new hepatitis B cases could be prevented if hepatitis B vaccination were routinely offered to all persons attending sexually transmitted disease clinics and to all correctional facility inmates.
- FACT:** About 42% of adults who become infected with HBV have a risk factor for infection in 2007.
- FACT:** Even if a person infected with HBV does not feel sick, he or she can still infect others.
- FACT:** HBV infection can result in chronic (life-long) infection that increases a person's risk of developing chronic liver disease, including cirrhosis and liver cancer.
- FACT:** An estimated 800,000- 1.4 million people in the United States have chronic HBV infection.
- FACT:** HBV infection kills about 2,000 to 4,000 people in the United States each year, usually as the result of complications from chronic liver disease.
- FACT:** HBV is found in blood and other body fluids such as semen and vaginal secretions. The hepatitis B virus is 100 times more infectious than HIV, the virus that causes AIDS.
- FACT:** Hepatitis B is a sexually-transmitted disease but can also be transmitted during normal household contact with an infected person.
- FACT:** The hepatitis B vaccine is the first vaccine that prevents a form of cancer — liver cancer.
- FACT:** Infants born to HBV-infected women have a very high chance of getting HBV infection from their mothers unless they receive their first hepatitis B vaccination at birth.

## Vaccine Safety

Hepatitis B vaccine is safe and effective. You cannot get hepatitis B from the vaccine. The most common side effect of the vaccine is soreness at the injection site. As with any medicine, there are very small risks that serious problems could occur after getting the vaccine. However, the potential risks associated with hepatitis B disease are much greater than the potential risks associated with the hepatitis B vaccine.