

Hepatitis B

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a serious liver disease caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). Hepatitis B can be acute or chronic. Acute hepatitis B happens during initial infection. Most adults can clear the infection on their own, and some will progress to becoming chronic carriers. Chronic carriers can spread the virus to others for the rest of their life.

How can I get hepatitis B?

The HBV is spread through contact with an infected person's blood, bodily fluids, or through sexual contact. The virus can also be spread by sharing needles, by piercings, or by tattooing.

An infected mother can also pass the virus to their baby during birth. Rarely, HBV can be spread by a bite from an infected person.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis B?

Most people who are infected with the HBV are asymptomatic. Symptoms of hepatitis B may include:

- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Fever
- Abdominal pain
- Nausea and vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Pale/grey colored stools
- Dark urine

Who is at risk of getting hepatitis B?

Those at risk include:

- Unvaccinated individuals
- Sexual partners of those who have hepatitis B
- People who have multiple sex partners
- Children and household members of someone with hepatitis B
- People who use injection drugs
- Certain occupations (i.e. health care workers, firefighters, etc.)
- People who travel to endemic countries

What can happen if I get hepatitis B?

Complications of hepatitis B include liver cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), liver failure, and possibly liver cancer. However, not all people infected with hepatitis B will develop these complications.

Can I get hepatitis B more than once?

If you have been infected and have recovered from the virus, generally, immunity is life-long.

How is hepatitis B treated?

Speak to your health care provider (HCP) for more information about possible treatment options.

What do I do if I come into contact with hepatitis B?

If you suspect you have come into contact with someone with hepatitis B, please speak to your HCP. Blood tests can be ordered to confirm if you have been infected.

What can I do to prevent hepatitis B?

Get immunized! Immunization generally provides long-lasting protection against hepatitis B for the majority of people.

In addition to immunization, hepatitis B can also be prevented by:

- Adopt safer sex practices
- Receiving Hepatitis B Immunoglobulin (HBIG) if recently exposed (from 7-14 days) to infected blood or bodily fluids
- Screening pregnant women and administering HBIG and the first dose of hepatitis B vaccine at birth to newborn babies. Second dose should be given to the newborn at one month of age and the third dose should be given at six months of age. This provides the newborn a 95% chance of not being infected with hepatitis B.

How can I prevent the spread to others?

- If you are getting a piercing, tattooing, or having acupuncture, ensure that the service is regulated or inspected, uses single-use needles, and that other equipment is sterilized

- Wear protective gloves if you are likely to come in contact with blood
- Practice safer sex by using a condom every time
- Do not share razors, toothbrushes, or other personal care items such as nail clippers
- Let anyone who may come into contact with your blood and bodily fluids know that you have hepatitis B
- Mothers who have hepatitis B and are breastfeeding should take good care of their nipples to prevent cracking and bleeding

Who can I call for more information?

Contact the Canadian Liver Foundation for support and information by visiting liver.ca or calling toll free 1-800-563-5483. You can also call the Halton Region Health Department for more information.

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