

# Hepatitis B

## FACT SHEET



### What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a contagious liver infection caused by the *hepatitis B virus*. The virus is found in the blood and body fluids of infected people. Many cases are mild and most people recover within 6 months. Some individuals go on to become carriers for the rest of their lives, possibly infecting others. Chronic carriers may develop long-term liver disease and possibly liver cancer.

### What are the symptoms?

- Loss of appetite
- Fatigue
- Yellowing of skin or eyes
- Fever
- Nausea and vomiting
- Muscle and joint pain
- Itching skin
- Dark colored urine
- Light colored stools
- Abdominal pain

Most children and about half of all adults who get hepatitis B never feel sick at all. However, others become so ill they need to be hospitalized. A blood test for hepatitis B may not show the infection until 2-6 months after exposure to the virus. Symptoms appear from 6 weeks to 6 months after exposure and can last from a few weeks to a few months.

### How is it spread?

Hepatitis B is spread by direct contact with infected blood or body fluids. It can be spread through tattooing, body piercing, injecting drugs, sharing needles, needle-sticks, and unprotected oral, anal, and vaginal sexual contact. Pregnant women who are infected can pass the virus to their baby. The virus is **not** spread by shaking hands, hugging or sharing food or drink.

### Who is most at risk for getting hepatitis B?

- Persons who inject illicit drugs (IV drug use)
- Sexual partners of an infected person
- Family and housemates of an infected person
- Healthcare workers
- Infants born to infected mothers

### How is it treated?

**For acute Hepatitis B:** There is no medication to treat acute Hepatitis B. Healthcare providers recommend rest, hydration, and proper nutrition. More serious cases will need to be hospitalized.

**For chronic Hepatitis B:** These patients should receive continuous care from a healthcare provider so as to monitor for signs of liver disease. There are new medications available for chronic Hepatitis B, with new drugs continuing to be developed. They should avoid alcohol because it can cause additional liver damage.

### How is it prevented?

- The best way to prevent hepatitis B is to get vaccinated against the disease. Vaccines are available from your health care provider or your local health department. The vaccines are given as 3 shots over a 6-month period. Booster doses are not currently recommended.
- Don't share needles, toothbrushes, eating utensils or razors that could be contaminated with blood or body fluids.
- If you are a health care worker, follow routine barrier precautions; handle needles and other sharps safely, and get vaccinated.
- If a surface is contaminated with blood or body fluids, wear latex gloves and mop up with a disinfectant solution.
- **Don't use IV drugs.** If you do use IV drugs, stop and get into a treatment program. If you can't stop, NEVER reuse or share your drug works. Contact your local health department for more information on cleaning your works and needle exchange programs.
- If you are thinking about getting a tattoo or body piercing, remember that you can get infected if the tools haven't been cleaned properly, or if the artist doesn't wear clean gloves with each new customer.
- If you are sexually active, have sex with only one person who is only having sex with you.
- Use a new condom with a water-based lubricant every time you have sex.
- Know your sex partner's history of IV drug use.

### If you have hepatitis B:

- Don't donate blood, plasma, body parts or sperm.
- Cover open sores or other breaks in your skin.
- Be tested to see if you are a chronic carrier.

*This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information contact your health care provider or visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov).*