

frequently asked About Hepatitis B



What is hepatitis B?

answer

"Hepatitis" means inflammation of the liver. This condition can be caused by drugs, alcohol, chemicals, and viruses that attack the liver, such as hepatitis virus types A, B, C, D, and E. The following information concerns only hepatitis B infection.

How is hepatitis B spread?

answer

Hepatitis B virus is spread when blood or body fluids from an infected person enter another person's body through a break in the skin (e.g. cuts, needlesticks) or mucous membranes (e.g. eyes, sores in the mouth), or through sexual intercourse. In addition to blood, hepatitis B virus can be found in semen, vaginal fluids, and saliva. Hepatitis B virus is not found in urine or feces.

Persons who put themselves at risk for getting hepatitis B include those who share needles to inject drugs, sexual partners of injection drug users, men who have sex with other men, and any person who has sex with more than one partner. Hepatitis B can also be spread by ear piercing, body piercing, tattooing, and acupuncture, if equipment or needles are not sterilized between use. Although rare, the virus can be spread if personal items, such as razor blades used by an infected person, are shared with a non-infected person. Employees in jobs which expose them to human blood may be at risk for hepatitis B infection. Also at risk are persons from certain areas of the world where hepatitis B is common.

Children born to mothers who are carriers of hepatitis B virus are at the greatest risk of getting infected

from exposure to the mother's blood during birth. Unless vaccinated at the time of birth, these babies can become "chronic carriers," which means they are infected with the virus for life. Of children who become infected with the virus between one and five years of age, 30-50 percent become carriers. Between 6 percent and 10 percent of the adults who get hepatitis B can become chronic carriers. As long as the virus is present in the blood and body fluids, the person is infectious. In people who are in a stable long-term monogamous relationship the chances of giving or getting hepatitis B are very low.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis B?

answer

The symptoms of hepatitis B disease may develop between 6 weeks and 6 months (average time 2-3 months after exposure). Symptoms develop slowly and may include tiredness, loss of appetite, abdominal discomfort, nausea, vomiting, and mild fever. Joint pains, muscle aches, rash, and jaundice (yellowing of the skin or eyes) may occur in some cases. Less than 1% of the people who get hepatitis B die from it during the acute (early) phase. Recovery from hepatitis B may take several months. Some persons who are infected with hepatitis B virus may have only mild symptoms or no symptoms at all. These persons may not know they are infected, and may not see a doctor. Persons with chronic hepatitis B infection may later develop serious problems like liver cancer and liver failure.



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How will I know if I have hepatitis B ?

answer

Blood tests can tell if you are infected with the hepatitis B virus. These tests can also help your physician determine whether you are currently ill with hepatitis B or if you are a chronic carrier. Although there is no treatment for the disease, bed rest and an adequate diet are important. Alcohol and medications (unless prescribed by your physician) should be restricted. Follow-up blood tests are necessary to tell if the disease is gone.

How can I reduce the chances of spreading hepatitis B ?

answer

- If you shoot street drugs, do not share drugs, needles, syringes, cookers, cotton, water, or rinse cups.
- Properly sterilize instruments used to puncture the skin.

- Abstain from sex or have sex only with a mutually faithful, uninfected or vaccinated partner. If you choose to have sex with more than one partner, do not exchange blood, semen or vaginal secretions (use latex condoms correctly every time or do not have penetrative sex). Although condoms are not 100% effective (they can slip, break or leak), they are better than no protection at all. The efficacy of latex condoms is unknown but their proper use may reduce transmission.
- Maintain good personal hygiene. Do not share toothbrushes, razors or other personal items. They may have blood on them. Practice thorough, frequent hand washing with soap and running water, especially after contact with blood or body fluids (changing bandages, cleaning bloody noses, etc.).
- Clean and disinfect objects or surfaces that are contaminated with blood or body fluids. Clean first with detergent and water. Disinfect with a household bleach and water solution (use 1/4 cup bleach in 1 gallon of water).
- If you are at risk for getting hepatitis B infection, talk to your physician about the need for a hepatitis B vaccine. The vaccine is given intramuscularly in the arm according to the following schedule:

Dose	Timing
1st dose	Elected date
2nd dose	1 month later
3rd dose	4-6 months after first dose

- Injections of hepatitis B immune globulin (HBIG) may be indicated for some exposed persons. Contact your physician or health department for information.

If you are infected with the hepatitis B virus:

- Tell your medical and dental providers.
- Do not donate blood, semen or organs.

Current immunization recommendations include giving the hepatitis B vaccine to:

- All infants
- All previously unvaccinated children and adolescents
- All other persons whose lifestyle, occupation or health condition puts them at risk of getting the disease

• Hep B FAQ sheet •

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The information in this fact sheet is designed to help you understand and manage HBV and is not intended as medical advice. All persons with HBV should consult a medical practitioner for diagnosis and treatment of HBV.

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