



OFFICE OF POPULATION AFFAIRS

Hepatitis B

THE FACTS



Hepatitis B THE FACTS



What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a viral infection that affects the liver. Hepatitis B begins as an *acute* infection, an illness with a rapid onset, which may be of short duration.

However, in some cases hepatitis B remains in the body and becomes a long-term or *chronic* infection. The younger a person is when he/she contracts hepatitis B the more likely he/she is to develop a chronic infection.



How do people get Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B virus is transmitted through direct contact with fluids such as blood, semen, and vaginal secretions. Hepatitis B is most commonly transmitted through:

- Sexual contact
- Sharing needles and syringes
- Sharing razors and toothbrushes
- Being born to a mother with hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is not spread through sharing cups and utensils, or through hugging, shaking hands, or breastfeeding.

How common is Hepatitis B?

Between 800,000 and 1.4 million people in the United States are living with chronic hepatitis B infection, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). An estimated 38,000 new hepatitis B cases occur each year in the U.S.



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What are the symptoms?

About 70% of adults with hepatitis B develop symptoms. Some young children -especially those under age 5- are less likely to have symptoms, but are at greater risk of developing chronic hepatitis B infection.

Symptoms of acute hepatitis B might include:



- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)
- Nausea and vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Joint pain (arthritis)
- Loss of appetite
- Fever
- Malaise (feeling of ill health)
- Fatigue (feeling tired all the time) Unusual discharge or drip from the vagina

What are the symptoms of chronic Hepatitis B?

Some people have symptoms similar to acute hepatitis B, but most with chronic hepatitis B go as long as 20-30 years without any signs. Between 15%-25% of those with chronic hepatitis B develop serious liver diseases such as cancer, cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), or liver failure, all of which can be fatal.



Testing/Diagnosis

There are many tests available for hepatitis B; they can be done as a single test or a series of several tests. Some look for particles of the hepatitis B virus, while others look for antibodies (substances the immune system produces in response to an infection) to hepatitis B. Blood tests can also indicate if a person has acute or chronic hepatitis.



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What is the treatment for acute Hepatitis B?

There is no specific medication to treat acute hepatitis B. Healthcare providers often recommend getting rest, drinking plenty of fluids, and eating a healthy diet.

What is the treatment for chronic Hepatitis B?

Anyone with chronic hepatitis B should be referred to a healthcare professional with experience in treating hepatitis and liver diseases. There are several medications available to treat chronic hepatitis B, but not every case requires treatment. It's important that a patient with chronic hepatitis B be monitored regularly by a health care professional to make sure his/her liver is healthy.

A person with hepatitis B should avoid alcohol and should consult with his/her healthcare provider before taking any supplements or over-the-counter medications, as some of these products can damage the liver.



Reduce your risk

The hepatitis B vaccine provides excellent protection against hepatitis B infection. Know your vaccination status and get vaccinated if you haven't been vaccinated previously. The vaccine is given in a series of 3-4 injections over six months. The vaccine is appropriate for anyone who desires protection against hepatitis B. The vaccine is recommended for:

- Infants and children under age 19
- Men who have sex with men
- Sexual partners of those with hepatitis B
- Injecting drug users who share needles, syringes, or other equipment
- Healthcare workers
- Travelers to areas where hepatitis B is common
- Patients with chronic liver disease



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For unvaccinated individuals with a recent exposure to someone with acute hepatitis B, an injection of hepatitis B immune globulin (HBIG) may prevent illness. An injection can provide protection for about three months.

There are several other things that can lower a person's risk of getting hepatitis B:

- Avoid sharing objects such as needles, razors, and toothbrushes (e.g., items which may have come in contact with another person's blood).
- Use a condom or other latex barrier (such as a dental dam) for each sex act (oral, anal, and vaginal). A barrier should be put on before any sexual contact takes place.
- Have sex with only one partner (who only has sex with you).

Sources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:

- [Hepatitis B Information for the Public](#)
- [2010 STD Treatment Guidelines](#)

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

- [Hepatitis B](#)

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