

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. When the inflammation is caused by infection with the hepatitis B virus (HBV), the disease is called hepatitis B. Hepatitis B can be either acute (short-term) or chronic (long-term). Over time, chronic hepatitis B can cause serious health problems, such as cirrhosis (liver scarring), liver cancer, and even death.

Who gets hepatitis B?

Anyone can get hepatitis B. People at higher risk of becoming infected with HBV if they have not received the hepatitis B vaccine or had hepatitis B disease in the past, include:

- People who inject drugs or share needles or syringes, or other drug equipment.
- Sex partners of people with hepatitis B.
- Men who have sex with men (MSM).
- People who live with a person infected with HBV.
- Hemodialysis patients.
- Healthcare workers who have unprotected contact with infected blood.
- Persons who live in institutions such as developmental centers and prisons.
- Babies born to mothers infected with HBV.

How is hepatitis B spread?

HBV is carried in the blood and body fluids of people who have the infection. The virus can be spread by direct contact with blood, semen, and vaginal fluids, and to a lesser extent, saliva, and other body fluids of an infected person. The virus can survive outside the body for at least seven days. During that time, the virus is still capable of causing infection. Contact with very small amounts of blood or body fluids from an infected person can transmit the infection.

A person is infectious as long as live HBV remains in his or her body, even if there are no symptoms. Most people clear the infection within a few months without any complications, and eliminate the virus from their body. About 5% of adults and 90% of infants develop chronic hepatitis B, which means that the HBV continues to survive in the body and cause damage to the liver. Chronic hepatitis B infection increases the risk of cirrhosis (liver scarring) and liver cancer. People who develop chronic hepatitis B can be infectious for life.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis B?

About 30%-50% of people aged five years and older have symptoms from acute hepatitis B. These include fatigue, poor appetite, fever, vomiting, stomach pain, joint pain, dark urine, clay-colored stool, and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes). Symptoms are less common in children under five years old and people with serious health problems. Most people with chronic hepatitis B do not have any symptoms. If symptoms appear, they are similar to the symptoms of acute hepatitis B, but can be a sign of advanced liver disease.

How soon after exposure do symptoms appear?

If symptoms of acute hepatitis B occur, they usually begin 90 days (or 3 months) after exposure, but they can appear any time between 8 weeks and 5 months after exposure.

How is hepatitis B diagnosed?

Hepatitis B is diagnosed using various laboratory tests and the presence of certain symptoms. There are many different blood tests available to diagnose hepatitis B. They can be ordered as an individual test or as a series of tests.

What is the treatment for hepatitis B?

There is no treatment for acute hepatitis B. In general, rest, adequate nutrition, and fluids are all that are needed for uncomplicated cases. Several medications are available for the treatment of chronic hepatitis B. Questions and concerns about management of acute and chronic hepatitis B should be addressed with a healthcare provider.

How can hepatitis B be prevented?

A safe and effective vaccine is available to prevent hepatitis B. Completing the series of shots is needed for full protection. The vaccine is recommended for all babies at birth, and children and adolescents younger than 19 years of age who have not been vaccinated. It is also recommended for people in high-risk settings who have not already been infected. Hepatitis B immune globulin is also available for people who have been exposed to the virus. It can help prevent the disease if it is given within two weeks of exposure. It should be given within 12 hours of birth to babies born to mothers with hepatitis B. If you believe you have been exposed to HBV, you should consult a doctor or the local health department as soon as possible.

What precautions should persons with hepatitis B take?

Persons who are ill with symptoms of acute hepatitis B or who have chronic hepatitis B should ensure that their close contacts are not exposed to their blood or other body fluids. Close contacts, including household members and sexual partners, should receive HBV vaccine, unless they are known to be immune to HBV. Razors, toothbrushes, blood glucose monitors, or any other object that might become contaminated with blood should never be shared. Environmental surfaces potentially contaminated with blood or body fluids should be cleaned with a solution of household bleach in water (i.e., 1.5 cups of 5.25% bleach in 1 gallon of water). HBV-infected persons should inform their dentists and healthcare providers about their hepatitis B status.

How can I get more information about hepatitis B?

- If you have concerns about hepatitis B, contact your healthcare provider.
- Call your local health department. A directory of local health departments is located at <https://www.vdh.virginia.gov/local-health-districts/>.
- Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hbv/index.htm>.

Hepatitis B Fact Sheet

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