

Hepatitis B Fact Sheet

Hepatitis B (HBV) is the virus that causes the liver disease Hepatitis B.

Hepatitis B can cause a short-term illness (acute) or a life long (chronic) infection. Chronic infection may go on to cause life-threatening cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), liver failure, or liver cancer. After acute HBV infection, the risk of developing chronic infection varies with age. Infants infected at birth have about a 90% chance of chronic illness, compared to 1-10% for older children and adults.

Hepatitis B virus is spread by exposure to blood and body fluids.

HBV is transmitted by exposure to blood or body fluid from an acutely or chronically infected person. The virus can be spread during unprotected sex, direct blood to blood contact (for example, sharing needles during illegal drug use, and from infected mother to baby, usually at birth). HBV is not spread by casual contact, such as shaking hands. Anyone who has not gotten the vaccine can get HBV, but there are people who may be at greater risk. Those at higher risk include:

- Men who have sex with men
- Illicit drug users
- Inmates of a correctional facility
- Sexually active heterosexuals (more than 1 partner in 6 months)
- Individuals diagnosed with a sexually transmitted disease (STD)
- Persons who have unprotected sex with a HBV-infected person
- Sex contacts or close household members of a chronically infected person
- Healthcare providers and emergency responders who have exposure to blood
- People born in Asia, Africa, South America, Pacific Islands, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East
- Yellow skin and eyes (jaundice)
- Kidney dialysis patients
- Babies born to HBV-infected mothers

Symptoms to look for:

- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea and vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Yellow skin and eyes (jaundice)
- Dark-colored urine
- Muscle aches/Joint Pain

Symptoms usually occur within 45 to 160 days (usually 60 to 90 days) after the person has been exposed; though many times a person can be asymptomatic (carrier). Carriers are at risk of liver problems later in life, like liver cancer or cirrhosis (scarring of the liver).

See a doctor immediately for treatment/ recommendations.

A blood test is required for diagnosis of HBV. If you test positive you need to know if you have a new infection, have recovered from a past infection, or if you have a chronic infection. ALL pregnant women should be tested for HBV.

Limited treatment is available for hepatitis B.

There is no special treatment for someone who has acute infection; however rest and avoiding alcohol and certain drugs are advised. Even though there is still no complete cure for chronic hepatitis B, there are 6 approved drugs for adults (2 for children) and other drugs under development. Talk to your doctor for more information and get a medical evaluation for liver disease every 6-12 months.

Hepatitis B is vaccine preventable.

Routine vaccination is recommended for all newborns prior to hospital discharge, all children and teens ages 0 through 18 years, and all persons who wish to be protected from hepatitis B virus infection. Persons who are considered at higher risk (listed above) and travelers to areas where the disease is common should also be immunized. Babies born to HBV-infected mothers should get the vaccine and a shot called HBIG (hepatitis B immune globulin) within 12 hours of birth. Post exposure treatment with HBIG and/or the vaccine is considered for occupational exposure after evaluation of the source and the exposed person.

Other prevention measures besides vaccination include practice safe sex, avoid direct contact with blood or body fluids, wash hands after any potential exposure, cover all cuts, avoid sharing personal items i.e. razors, clippers, or toothbrushes, clean up blood spills with bleach solution, and make sure new, sterile needles are used for ear or body piercing, tattoos, or acupuncture.

Carriers should avoid drinking alcohol or taking certain medications which are harmful to the liver. They should also get vaccinated for hepatitis A. Follow standard precautions to ensure close contacts are not directly contaminated by his or her blood or body fluids. Carriers should not share personal items i.e. razors or other items potentially contaminated with blood. Susceptible household members, particularly sexual partners, should be immunized with the hepatitis B vaccine. Don't donate blood, organs, or tissue.