



Acute Hepatitis B Fact Sheet

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a virus that enters the bloodstream and then infects the liver. Each year, thousands of people all ages get hepatitis B and 5,000 die of chronic (long-term) liver problems caused by hepatitis B. Someone that has had other types of hepatitis, such as A and C, can still get hepatitis B.

Who is at risk?

Anyone can get hepatitis B; however, certain people have a greater chance of becoming infected. These people include IV drug users, sexual partner of infected persons, babies of infected mothers, men who have sex with men, medical and dental workers, people living in a household with a “carrier”, and hemodialysis patients.

How is the virus spread?

Hepatitis B is most often spread from person to person through contact with infected semen, vaginal secretions or blood. Having sex with an infected person and sharing needles for drug use are two very common ways that people become infected. It can also be spread by an infected mother to her baby at birth.

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What happens after a person is exposed to hepatitis B?

After a person is exposed to hepatitis B, several things may happen: they may not become infected, they may become infected but not get sick, or they may become infected and get sick.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may be mild or they may be very severe and can appear 45-180 days after exposure. Symptoms include nausea, vomiting, fever, stomach pain, tea colored urine, and yellowing of the skin and eyes, and/or being very tired. Remember, most people infected with hepatitis B do not develop all of these symptoms and may not know they are infected. Hepatitis B is diagnosed by a blood test.

How soon do the symptoms appear?

It takes anywhere from two to six months after exposure before the symptoms of infection show up.

How long can an infected person spread the virus?

Most adults with hepatitis B will get rid of the virus within four to six months. They will no longer be capable of giving the infection to others and they can never get it again. However, about one out of every ten infected adults and as many as nine out of ten babies,

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will become lifelong “carriers” of hepatitis B, meaning they do not get rid of the virus. Most hepatitis B carriers do not look or feel sick. However, they may eventually develop serious liver diseases such as cirrhosis or liver cancer. Even though carriers may feel healthy, they can still spread the hepatitis B virus to other people.

What is the treatment for hepatitis B?

There is no specific treatment that can make the infection go away. People who are sick with hepatitis B should see a doctor for advice about how to control their symptoms. “Interferon” is a special drug that is sometimes given to carriers of hepatitis B who have serious liver disease.

What can you do to take care of yourself?

Follow these instructions until your doctor tells you that you are no longer infected:

- Avoid alcoholic beverages and street drugs. They will damage your liver.
- Avoid taking prescription or over the counter medicines unless your doctor tells you it is OK.
- Eat a healthy diet and get enough rest.

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- See your doctor at least once a year. Discuss with your doctor about having a blood test every six to twelve months to make sure your liver is healthy and there is not a liver cancer developing. Talk to your doctor about having a special test (called an “ultrasound”) done on your liver occasionally.
- If you get pregnant, tell your doctor you have hepatitis B. It is important that your baby is started on hepatitis B shots immediately at birth to stop the baby from getting hepatitis B.

What can you do to protect others?

- Cover all cuts and sores with a bandage and wash hands well after touching blood or body fluids.
- Throw away any items that have your blood on them, such as bandages and menstrual pads, in plastic bags and close tightly.
- Clean up blood spills with paper towels. Then reclean the area with a bleach solution (1 part bleach to 10 parts water).
- Tell your sex partner that you have hepatitis B and use a condom until that person has been tested and, if necessary, vaccinated against hepatitis B.
- Ask your sex partners and all those who live in your household to see a doctor for testing and for hepatitis B vaccination.

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- Do not share chewing gum, toothbrushes, razors, scissors, needles for ear piercing, nail files or anything else that may come in contact with your blood or body fluids.
- Do not share food, drink, cigarettes, and lipstick or lip balm.
- Do not share syringes and needles.
- Do not donate blood, plasma, body organs, and sperm or breast milk.

*For further information, contact the
Oklahoma City-County Health Department
(405) 425-4437*

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