



Hepatitis B Fact Sheet

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a virus that enters the bloodstream and infects the liver. Long-term (chronic) infection can lead to serious health issues, like cirrhosis or liver cancer.

Who gets hepatitis B?

Anyone can get hepatitis B. However, certain people have a greater chance of becoming infected including: injection drug users; babies of infected mothers; sexual partners of infected persons, including men who have sex with men; healthcare workers; and people living in a household with a person with Hepatitis B.

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. Babies born to infected mothers and people who live in the house with a “carrier” of hepatitis B are also at risk. HBV is not spread through food or water, sharing eating utensils, breastfeeding, hugging, kissing, hand holding, coughing, or sneezing

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may vary in severity and include fatigue, nausea, vomiting, fever, stomach pain, tea colored urine,

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Hepatitis B Fact Sheet

and yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice). Most people infected with hepatitis B do not develop all these symptoms and may never know they were infected.

What happens after a person is exposed to hepatitis B?

Exposure to Hepatitis B doesn't necessarily mean an infection will develop. Among vaccinated individuals, cases of Hepatitis B infection are reduced by 95%. Some people, especially adults, can clear the virus without treatment or chronic infection. People who clear the virus become immune and cannot get infected with the hepatitis B virus again. However, infants and children with acute hepatitis B infection are more likely to develop chronic infection.

How soon do the symptoms appear?

Symptoms commonly appear within two to three months but can occur from six weeks to six months after infection.

How long can an infected person spread the virus?

If chronic infection doesn't develop, most adults with hepatitis B will get rid of the virus within four to six months and is no longer infectious. However, about 10% of adults and 90% of infants will develop chronic hepatitis B, meaning they will remain infectious. Even though people with Hepatitis B infection may feel healthy, they can still

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Hepatitis B Fact Sheet

spread the virus to other people.

How is hepatitis B diagnosed?

A blood test is used to detect infection with the hepatitis B virus.

Can a person get hepatitis B again?

If antibodies develop, one infection with the hepatitis B virus protects a person from getting it again. People with chronic hepatitis B infection remain infected for life. Having hepatitis B infection or immunity does not protect an individual from other types of viral hepatitis.

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 be done if a person comes into contact with someone infected with hepatitis B? Hepatitis B immune globulin (HBIG) and hepatitis B vaccine can prevent infection if given very soon after an exposure. This treatment is available from doctors in your community.

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Hepatitis B Fact Sheet

How can infection with hepatitis B be prevented?

Never share needles for drug use, tattooing, or any other purpose. Avoid contact with the blood of any other person. Use condoms when having sex. Do not share items that may be contaminated with blood like razors, toothbrushes, ear rings and nail clippers.

Is there a vaccine to prevent hepatitis B?

Yes, there is a vaccine to protect against hepatitis B infection. It is generally recommended for persons who are at high risk for infection and for all newborn babies.

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

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