



## Hepatitis B Fact Sheet

### **What is hepatitis B?**

Hepatitis B is a virus that enters the bloodstream and infects the liver. Long-term infection (“carrier”) is common and may result in chronic liver disease or liver cancer.

### **Who gets hepatitis B?**

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

### **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.

### **What are the symptoms?**

Symptoms may be mild or they may be very severe. Symptoms include being very tired, nausea, vomiting, fever, stomach pain, tea colored urine, and yellowing of the skin and eyes (Jaundice). Most people infected with

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## Hepatitis B Fact Sheet

hepatitis B do not develop all these symptoms, and may never know they were infected.

### **How soon do the symptoms appear?**

Loss of appetite and stomach pain 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?**

A person can spread the virus as long as it remains in their blood. Most adults will get rid of the virus within four to six months, however, about one out of every ten adults will become lifelong “carriers”, meaning they will probably never get rid of the virus. As many as nine out of every ten infected babies will become carriers.

### **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. Carriers remain infected for life. However, there are different kinds of hepatitis; infection with hepatitis B will not stop a person from getting other types of hepatitis.

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## Hepatitis B Fact Sheet

### **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.

### **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.

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

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