

Hepatitis B

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a vaccine preventable liver infection caused by the Hepatitis B virus (HBV). hepatitis B can be a short-term (acute) or long-term (chronic) illness.

What is the difference between short-term and long-term Hepatitis B?

Short-term (acute) hepatitis B causes sickness within 6 months of being exposed. For unknown reasons, some people get better on their own without any treatment. Some people who get the hepatitis B virus go on to have long-term hepatitis B. The younger a person is the more likely they will have long-term hepatitis B. Long-term (chronic) hepatitis B is an illness that occurs when the hepatitis B virus remains in the body. It can lead to problems like liver damage, scarring, failure, or cancer.

How is Hepatitis B Spread?

Hepatitis B is passed from person to person through blood, semen, or other body fluids. A person can get hepatitis B from:

- Birth (passed from mother to baby during birth)
- Sex with a partner who has HBV infection
- Sharing needles, syringes, or drug preparation equipment
- Sharing household items like razors, toothbrushes, or medical equipment (like a glucose monitor) with a person who has hepatitis B
- Direct contact with infected blood or open sores of a person who has hepatitis B
- Exposure to the blood from a person who has hepatitis B through needlesticks or other sharp instruments

Many people with hepatitis B don't know they are infected with the virus because they don't feel sick or look sick. However, they can still spread the virus to others.

Can Hepatitis B be spread through sex?

Yes. The hepatitis B virus can be found in the blood, semen, and other body fluids of an infected person. A person who has sex with an infected partner can become infected with the virus.

What are the symptoms Hepatitis B?

Not all people with acute hepatitis B infection have symptoms. When present, signs and symptoms of acute HBV infections can include:

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Clay-colored stool
- Joint pain
- Jaundice

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Can I prevent myself from getting Hepatitis B?

The best way to prevent hepatitis B is by getting the Hepatitis B Vaccine. Other ways to keep yourself from getting hepatitis B are to:

- Use a protective barrier (condom or female condom) every time when having sex
- Do not share needles
- Do not share items that might have blood on them, even in a tiny amount
- Only get tattoos or piercings from a shop with an up-to-date license
- If pregnant, get regular prenatal screenings



How do I know if I have Hepatitis B?

Talk to your health care provider if you have risk factors for or think you might have hepatitis B. Since many people with hepatitis B do not have symptoms, blood tests are used to diagnose the infection. Several different hepatitis B tests are available.

How is Hepatitis B treated?

There is no medicine available to treat short-term Hepatitis B. When it is caught, doctors recommend plenty of rest, eating healthy, and drinking lots of fluids. Some people may need to be hospitalized. Several medications have been approved to treat people who have chronic hepatitis B, and new drugs are in development. However, not every person with chronic hepatitis B needs medication, and the drugs may cause side effects in some patients. People who start hepatitis B treatment may need to take medication indefinitely because these medications do not lead to a cure.

Can a baby be protected from getting Hepatitis B during birth?

A baby can be protected from getting hepatitis B from his or her mother by getting two vaccines before they leave the hospital (HBIG and the first Hepatitis B vaccine) and then 2-3 additional shots of vaccine over the next 1-15 months. If a baby is not vaccinated he or she can have a long-term hepatitis B infection which can lead to serious health problems including liver damage, liver cancer, and death.

Do babies need the Hepatitis B vaccine if a pregnant woman does not have Hepatitis B?

Yes. All babies should get their first hepatitis B shot before leaving the hospital. The hepatitis B vaccine is recommended for all babies so that they will be protected from a serious disease.

For more information:

Visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's website at <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hbv/index.htm> or call Huron County Public Health at 419-668-1652 ext. 269.