

Fact Sheet: Hepatitis B

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a liver disease caused by the *hepatitis B virus* (HBV). The is found in the blood and body fluids of infected people. Many cases are mild and most people recover within 6 months. Some individuals go on to become carriers for the rest of their lives, possibly infecting others. Chronic carriers may develop long-term liver disease and possibly liver cancer.

What are the symptoms?

- Loss of appetite
- Weight loss
- Yellowing of the skin or eyes
- Fever
- Nausea and vomiting
- Muscle and joint pain
- Itching skin
- Dark colored urine
- Light colored stools

Most children and about half of all adults who get hepatitis B never feel sick at all. However, others become so ill they need to be hospitalized. A blood test for hepatitis B may not show the infection until 2-6 months after exposure to the virus. Symptoms appear from 6 weeks to 9 months after exposure.

How is it spread?

Hepatitis B is spread by direct contact with infected blood or body fluids. It can be spread through tattooing, body piercing, injecting drugs, needle-sticks, and unprotected oral, anal, and vaginal sexual contact. Pregnant women who are infected can pass the virus to their baby. The virus is **not** spread by shaking hands, hugging or sharing food or drink.

Who is most at risk for getting Hepatitis B?

- IV drug users
- People with many sexual partners
- Sexual partners of an infected person
- Family and housemates of an infected person
- Healthcare workers
- Infants born to infected mothers

How is it treated?

If you think you have been exposed to Hepatitis B call your health care provider for a blood test. An injection may be given to you immediately after exposure, followed by a vaccine series of 3 injections. This may help prevent an acute infection after a known or suspected exposure. There is no cure for chronic hepatitis B. But, most individuals with an acute hepatitis B infection clear the disease on their own, with only a small percentage developing chronic liver disease.

How is it prevented?

- The best way to prevent hepatitis B is to get vaccinated against the disease. Vaccines are available from your health care provider or your local health department.
- Don't share needles, toothbrushes, eating utensils or razors that could be contaminated with blood or body fluids.
- If you are a health care worker, follow routine barrier precautions; handle needles and other sharps safely, and get vaccinated.
- If a surface is contaminated with blood or body fluids, wear latex gloves and mop up with a disinfectant solution (such as a solution with 1 part chlorine bleach with ten parts water).
- **Don't use IV drugs.** If you do use IV drugs, stop and get into a treatment program. If you can't stop, NEVER reuse or share your drug works. Contact your local health department for more information on cleaning your works and needle exchange programs.
- If you are thinking about getting a tattoo or body piercing, remember that you can get infected if the tools haven't been cleaned properly, or if the artist doesn't wear clean gloves with each new customer.
- If you are sexually active, have sex with only one person who is only having sex with you.
- Use a new condom with a water-based lubricant every time you have sex.
- Know your sex partner's history of IV drug use.

If you have hepatitis B:

- Don't donate blood, plasma, body parts or sperm.
- Cover open sores or other breaks in your skin.
- Be tested to see if you are a chronic carrier.

This fact sheet is for information only and is not meant to be used for self -diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care provider. For more information call your health care provider or call Washtenaw County Public Health at 734-544-6700.

