

Hepatitis B

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a disease caused by a virus that affects the liver. Hepatitis B can lead to chronic liver disease, liver cancer, and occasionally death. Approximately 43,000 people in the United States get hepatitis B every year.

How do I get hepatitis B?

You can get hepatitis B by direct contact with the blood or body fluid (semen, vaginal secretions, saliva) of an infected person. You are at risk of contracting hepatitis B if:

- You have had sex with an infected person.
- You have shared needles, syringes or drug works with an infected person.
- You have shared a razor, toothbrush or any other personal care product that might have had an infected person's blood on it.
- You have been exposed to infected blood or body fluid in health care and other (tattooing and body piercing) settings.
- Your mother had hepatitis B when she was pregnant with you.

Hepatitis B is NOT spread by breast-feeding, hugging, kissing, food or water, sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses, sneezing, coughing or casual contact. Persons should not be excluded from work, school, play, childcare, or other settings based on hepatitis B infection status.

Symptoms

Approximately 30-50% of the people who have hepatitis B never notice any symptoms, but are still able to spread the virus. Symptoms may begin 2-3 months after being exposed to the hepatitis B virus. Symptoms may include:

- Loss of appetite, stomach discomfort and nausea (sometimes with vomiting)
- Fatigue
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin or the whites of the eyes)
- Joint or muscle pain
- Brownish, tea-colored urine and gray or light-colored feces (stools)

Prevention

- Vaccinate yourself against hepatitis B, especially if you are at high risk for getting the virus.
- Practice safe sex. Always use latex condoms and do not have sex with an infected person unless you have already been vaccinated against hepatitis B.
- If you inject street drugs, never reuse or share needles, syringes, or drug works and never draw drugs out of the same container. If you do not have a new sterile syringe, make certain the syringe you use has been bleached thoroughly and rinsed with water.
- Use caution when handling items potentially contaminated with blood such as used needles, razors, tattooing equipment, ear/body piercing equipment, acupuncture needles, etc.
- Avoid obtaining tattoos or body piercing. If this is not possible, only use tattoo parlors and ear and body piercing shops that follow sterile procedures.
- Pregnant women should be tested for hepatitis B. If the mother is infected, the baby needs to receive a Hepatitis B Immune Globulin (HBIG) shot and the hepatitis B vaccine within 12 hours of birth.

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Hepatitis B (continued)

Treatment for hepatitis B

If you think you have been exposed to the hepatitis B virus, see your health care provider immediately. There are treatments available.

If you have hepatitis B:

- Your sexual partner should be fully vaccinated against hepatitis B.
 - Use latex condoms until your partner has been fully vaccinated.
 - Do not share razors, toothbrushes or any other personal items.
 - Do not donate blood, body organs, other tissues or sperm.
 - Do not drink alcohol.
 - Learn more about how you can protect your liver from further harm.
 - Learn more about how you can prevent spreading hepatitis B to others.
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