

Hepatitis B in Adults

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis B is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis B virus (known as HBV). Symptoms usually last a few weeks to a few months.

Once you get a hepatitis B infection you can carry the virus for the rest of your life.

Chronic (long-term) Hepatitis B disease can cause serious liver conditions such as cirrhosis (scarring of liver) or liver cancer. Hepatitis B can even cause death.

Who Can Get Hepatitis B?

Anyone can get hepatitis B. There is a vaccine to prevent hepatitis B.

How is Hepatitis B Spread?

The infection is spread:

- by having direct contact with blood or body fluids of an infected person
- by having sexual contact with an infected person
- by sharing toothbrushes, razors or medical equipment (such as a glucose monitor) with an infected person
- by sharing needles with an infected person
- during childbirth, from a mother to the baby.

People who have chronic (long-term) infection with the virus (known as hepatitis B carriers) never fully recover and can infect other people. Hepatitis B cannot be spread through food and water nor by casual contact (such as a hug or handshake).

Who is at Greater Risk for Hepatitis B?

People at risk for hepatitis B are those who:

- have a job that involves contact with human blood
- travel to areas of the world where hepatitis B is common
- are born to infected mothers
- live in the same household as a person who has lifelong hepatitis infection
- have sex with an infected person or more than one partner
- share needles when using intravenous drugs.
- men who have sex with men
- people who receive hemodialysis.

What are the Symptoms of Hepatitis B?

Only about 50 percent of people have symptoms of hepatitis B (children often do not). Symptoms are more common in adults and include:

- jaundice (yellow eyes)
- abdominal pain, joint pain or both
- fatigue (tiredness)
- appetite loss
- nausea (upset stomach), vomiting (throwing up)
- fever
- dark urine, clay-colored stools or both.

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What are the Side Effects of Hepatitis B?

Chronic (long-term) infection occurs in 90 percent of infants who are infected at birth, 25 to 50 percent of children who are infected after age 1, and 5 percent of people who are infected after age 5 years.

How is Hepatitis B Found?

A blood test will confirm hepatitis B.

How is Hepatitis B Treated?

- There is no treatment for sudden (acute) hepatitis B other than rest and liquids.
- There are medicines that can treat long-lasting (chronic) hepatitis B infection, but there is no cure.

How Long can the Hepatitis B Germ be Spread?

HBV can be spread as long as a person is infected even if no symptoms are present.

What is the Hepatitis B Vaccine?

The hepatitis B vaccine is available to anyone. Three doses are usually needed for total protection.

People who should receive the shot include:

- all infants
- anyone who did not receive the shot as an infant.

How can You Prevent the Spread of Hepatitis B?

To prevent the spread of hepatitis B:

- Get the hepatitis B vaccine.
- Use latex condoms when having sex.
- Pregnant women should get a blood test for hepatitis B.
- Do not use intravenous drugs. If you do and can't stop, do not share needles, syringes, water or any drug equipment.
- Do not share personal items that may have blood on them (toothbrushes or razors).
- Do not donate blood, organs or tissue if you have or had hepatitis B.

How Long Should Infected People Stay Home From Work or School?

People should not be kept out of work, school, daycare or other places due to HBV infection.

Information adapted from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.