



# Fact Sheet: Hepatitis B

## What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a liver disease caused by the *hepatitis B virus* (HBV). It 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. 30% have no symptoms.

### What are the symptoms?

- Lack of appetite and weight loss
- Fatigue
- Yellowing of the skin or eyes
- Fever
- Nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea
- Muscle and joint pain
- Itching skin
- Dark colored urine
- Light colored stools
- Swelling/tenderness of the liver
- Abdominal pain

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 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?

There is no cure for chronic hepatitis B. Most individuals with an acute hepatitis B infection clear the disease on their own, with only a small percentage developing chronic liver disease. There is an injection that may be given to you immediately after exposure, followed by a series of 3 vaccine shots. This may help prevent an acute infection after a known or suspected exposure. A healthy diet and avoiding alcohol will help protect your liver. If you think you have been exposed, call your health care provider for a blood test.

### How is it prevented?

- The best way to prevent hepatitis B is to get vaccinated against the disease. Vaccines are available from most health care providers 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 with ten parts water).
- **Don't shoot drugs.** If you do shoot 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 be 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 provide or 257-3612.*

Visit our website at: [www.gchd.us](http://www.gchd.us) or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)

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