



Getting a Letter from the Blood Bank

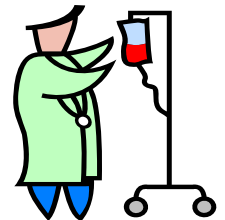
What Does It Mean?



What is hepatitis B? Hepatitis B is the world's most common serious liver infection. It is caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV) that attacks liver cells and can lead to liver failure, cirrhosis (scarring) or cancer of the liver later in life. Approximately 90% of healthy adults exposed to the hepatitis B virus (HBV) recover on their own and develop the protective surface antibody. However, 10% of infected adults, 50% of infected children and 90% of infected babies are unable to get rid of the virus and develop chronic infection. These people need further evaluation by a liver specialist or doctor knowledgeable about hepatitis B.

What do the blood banks screen for? All blood is screened for hepatitis B, as well as other blood-borne viruses such as HIV and hepatitis C. As a result, some people may receive a letter from the American Red Cross or another blood collection agency, notifying them that they may be infected with hepatitis B.

What should I do if I receive a letter from the blood bank? First, it is important that you do not panic. The letter does not necessarily mean you are infected with hepatitis B. Many blood banks use the "hepatitis B core antibody" test to screen donor blood for potential hepatitis B infection. This test is used to detect whether a person might have been exposed to the hepatitis B virus, but by itself, this blood test *doesn't tell whether the person is actually infected*. This is why it is very important to see your doctor for additional hepatitis B blood tests.



If you receive a letter that says your "hepatitis B core antibody" (HBcAb) blood test is positive, there could be several different interpretations:

- 1.) you could be infected with hepatitis B
- 2.) you could be recovering from an infection
- 3.) you could have already recovered from a past infection
- 4.) the result could be a false positive.



But you won't know why your test result is positive without further evaluation. So it is very important that you see your doctor for additional hepatitis B testing. Since blood collection agencies may use different screening tests for hepatitis B, it is important that your doctor order the complete panel of hepatitis B blood tests. This panel includes 3 basic tests, but only one sample of blood is needed.

What is the 3-part hepatitis B blood panel? The blood panel that your doctor will order includes the following tests:



- 1) Hepatitis B surface Antigen (HBsAg) - this tests directly for the presence of hepatitis B virus. If there is NO virus present, it should be negative.
- 2) Hepatitis B surface Antibody (HBsAb or anti-HBs) - this tests for the presence of protective antibodies against the hepatitis B virus. This blood test should be positive if the protective antibodies are produced in response to either vaccination or recovery from a natural infection.
- 3) Hepatitis B core Antibody (HBcAb or anti-HBc) - this antibody does not provide any protection, but only refers to a part of the virus itself. A positive test result may indicate whether a person has been exposed to the hepatitis B virus or not. This test can only be interpreted with the above 2 test results.

Tests	Results	Interpretation	Recommendation
HBsAg HBsAb HBcAb	Negative (-) Negative (-) Negative (-)	NOT IMMUNE– has not been infected but is still at risk for possible future infection – needs vaccine	Get the vaccine
HBsAg HBsAb HBcAb	Negative (-) Positive (+) Negative or positive (-/+)	IMMUNE – has been vaccinated or recovered from previous infection – cannot infect others	Vaccine is not needed
HBsAg HBsAb HBcAb	Positive (+) Negative (-) Negative or Positive (-/+)	ACUTE or CHRONIC INFECTION Hepatitis B virus is present – can spread the virus to others	Find a knowledgeable doctor for further evaluation
HBsAg HBsAb HBcAb	Negative (-) Negative (-) Positive (+)	UNCLEAR – several interpretations are possible – The 3-part hepatitis B blood panel should be repeated	Find a knowledgeable doctor for further evaluation

When you get the results of the 3-part hepatitis B blood panel, make sure you request a written copy so you fully understand what tests were ordered and the actual results of each. Also, be sure to have your doctor clearly explain the results to you so you fully understand your situation. Visit our website at www.hepb.org/bloodtests for more information about hepatitis B blood tests.

What if my blood tests indicate that I am infected with hepatitis B? If you are infected with hepatitis B, it is important to see a knowledgeable doctor or liver specialist (called a “hepatologist”) for follow-up evaluation. To find a specialist near you, please visit our website at www.hepb.org/specialistdirectory

Can you tell me more about hepatitis B infection? Hepatitis B is known as a "silent infection" and many people infected with the virus have no symptoms or only mild flu-like symptoms. It is transmitted through blood, unprotected sex, use of unsterile needles, and from an infected mother to her newborn during the delivery process. It is not transmitted casually through the air or superficial social contact. The best news, though, is that there is a safe and effective vaccine for everyone to protect themselves. Newborns, children, and adults can be protected from this potentially serious liver infection through vaccination!

For more information, please visit the following websites:

Hepatitis B Foundation website at www.hepb.org

HIV & Hepatitis Treatment Advocates at www.hivandhepatitis.com/tests.html

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) hepatitis branch at www.cdc.gov/hepatitis

Immunization Action Coalition at www.immunize.org

