

Hepatitis B Fact Sheet

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SOURCES:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

- ❖ [Hepatitis B Information for the Public](#)
- ❖ [2010 STD Treatment Guidelines](#)

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

- ❖ [Hepatitis B](#)

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a viral infection that affects the liver. Hepatitis B begins as an *acute* infection, meaning it's often a short-term illness from which people recover.



What are the symptoms of acute hepatitis B?

About 70% of adults with hepatitis B develop symptoms. Some young children -especially those under age 5- are less likely to have symptoms (but are at greater risk of developing chronic hepatitis B infection).

- ❖ Symptoms of acute hepatitis B might include:
- ❖ Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes)
- ❖ Nausea and vomiting
- ❖ Abdominal pain
- ❖ Dark urine
- ❖ Joint pain (arthritis)
- ❖ Loss of appetite
- ❖ Fever
- ❖ Malaise (feeling of ill health)
- ❖ Fatigue (feeling tired all the time)



What are the symptoms of chronic hepatitis B?

Some have symptoms similar to acute hepatitis B, but most with chronic hepatitis B go as long as 20-30 years without any signs. Between 15%-25% of those with chronic hepatitis B develop serious liver diseases such as cancer, cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), or liver failure, all of which can be fatal.

How common is hepatitis B?

Between 800,000 and 1.4 million people in the United States are living with chronic hepatitis B infection, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). There are approximately 43,000 new hepatitis B cases each year in the U.S.





Testing/Diagnosis

There are many tests available for hepatitis B, and they can be done as a single test or a series of several tests. Some tests for hepatitis B look for particles of the virus, while others look for antibodies (substances the immune system produces in response to an infection) to hepatitis B. Blood tests can also indicate if a person has acute or chronic hepatitis.



What is the treatment for acute hepatitis B?

Acute hepatitis B is typically an infection of short duration, and there is no specific medication to treat it. Healthcare providers often recommend getting rest, drinking plenty of fluids, and eating a healthy diet.



What is the treatment for chronic hepatitis B?

Anyone with chronic hepatitis B should be referred to a healthcare professional with experience in treating hepatitis and liver diseases. There are several medications available to treat chronic hepatitis B, but not every case requires treatment. It's important that a patient with chronic hepatitis B is checked often to make sure his/her liver is healthy.

A person with hepatitis B should avoid alcohol and should consult with his/her healthcare provider before taking any supplements or over-the-counter medications (as some of these products can damage the liver).

How do people get hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B virus is transmitted through direct contact with fluids such as blood, semen, and vaginal secretions. Hepatitis B is most commonly transmitted through:

- ❖ Sexual contact with an infected partner (this is the most common way adults and adolescents get the virus)
- ❖ Sharing needles and syringes
- ❖ Sharing razors and toothbrushes
- ❖ Childbirth if the mother has the infection

Hepatitis B is not spread through sharing cups and utensils, or through hugging, shaking hands, or breastfeeding.





Reduce your risk

The hepatitis B vaccine provides excellent protection against hepatitis B infection. The vaccine is given in a series of 3-4 injections over six months. The vaccine is appropriate for anyone who desires protection against hepatitis B. The vaccine is recommended for:

- ❖ Infants and children under age 19
- ❖ Men who have sex with men
- ❖ Sexual partners of those with hepatitis B
- ❖ Injecting drug users who share needles, syringes, or other equipment
- ❖ Healthcare workers
- ❖ Travelers to areas where hepatitis B is common
- ❖ Patients with chronic liver disease

For unvaccinated individuals with a recent exposure to someone with acute hepatitis B, an injection of hepatitis B immune globulin (HBIG) may prevent illness. An injection can provide protection for about three months.

There are several other things that can lower a person's risk of getting hepatitis B:

- ❖ Avoid sharing objects such as needles, razors, and toothbrushes.
- ❖ Use condoms or other latex barrier (such as a dental dam) for each sex act (oral, anal, and vaginal). A barrier should be put on before any sexual contact takes place.
- ❖ Have sex with only one partner (who only has sex with you)

