

Hepatitis B Fact Sheet

Hepatitis B is an infection of the liver caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV)

The virus is in blood and other body fluids

The virus is in blood, semen, menstrual blood, and other body fluids of a person with hepatitis B. Five to 10% of adults and about 90% of babies who catch hepatitis B will go on to "carry" or keep the virus for the rest of their lives. "Hepatitis B carriers" can pass the virus on to others (See Hepatitis B Carrier Fact Sheet).

Hepatitis B virus is spread by exposure to blood and body fluids

The virus can be spread during sex, by sharing needles, by getting stuck with a hepatitis B contaminated needle, or by getting blood or other infected body fluids in the mouth or eyes, or onto broken skin. The virus can also be passed from mother to baby, usually at the time of birth.

The virus is not spread by shaking hands, hugging, or sharing food or drink

Some people are at higher risk of hepatitis B:

- Intravenous drug users who share needles
- Health care workers, emergency workers, laboratory workers, and others who have contact with blood and body fluids
- Men who have sex with other men
- Anyone who has unprotected sex with a man or woman who has the hepatitis B virus
- People who live with a hepatitis B carrier
- Anyone who has many sex partners
- People who live or work in institutions for the mentally retarded.
- Babies born to mothers who have the virus
- People who have hemophilia or who are on kidney dialysis
- People born in Asia, the Caribbean, South America, Africa, the Pacific Islands and their children, as well as Alaskan natives

Most children and about half of all adults who get hepatitis B never feel sick at all

For these people, it takes a blood test to tell if they have the virus. The blood test may not show the infection until 2 to 6 months after contact with the virus. Carriers are at risk of liver problems later in life, like liver cancer or cirrhosis (scarring of the liver).

Symptoms to look for:

- Feeling tired
- Nausea and vomiting
- Loss of appetite
- Yellow skin and eyes (jaundice)

- Fever
- Dark-colored urine, light stool
- Stomach pain

Limited treatment is available for hepatitis B

People who are sick with hepatitis B need rest, fluids, proper diet, and to avoid alcohol and some medicines. Certain carriers may need medications such as interferon. Ask your doctor for further information.

You can prevent hepatitis B

Avoid exposure:

- Use latex condoms (rubbers) when you have sex;
- don't share needles;
- don't share personal care items like toothbrushes, razor blades, or nail clippers;
- avoid exposure to blood and body fluids at work.

Get vaccinated:

If you are in close contact with someone with the virus (sex partner, mother-baby contact, sharing needles, living in the same house with a carrier), or if you work in contact with blood, ask about getting three shots of hepatitis B vaccine to protect yourself. Babies born to mothers with the virus should get the vaccine and a shot called HBIG (hepatitis B immune globulin). Routine hepatitis B vaccination of all infants is now recommended.

Tell health and dental providers and don't donate blood.

People who are sick with hepatitis B or who are carriers should tell their doctors, dentists, and people they have sex with or share needles with. And remember, don't donate blood if you have, or ever had hepatitis B, even if you never felt sick.

