

Facts & DETAILS

Hepatitis B

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What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a contagious liver disease caused by the Hepatitis B virus (HBV).

How common is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B remains a common disease in many parts of the world, including areas in Asia and Africa. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that there were 20,900 chronic hepatitis B cases and 3,000 acute hepatitis B cases in the United States in 2016.

How do people become infected?

HBV is spread person to person when blood from an infected person enters the body of someone who is not infected. HBV is spread through sharing needles or other equipment to inject drugs; needle sticks or sharps exposures on the job; having sex with an infected person; sharing personal items contaminated with infectious blood; or from an infected mother to her baby during birth.

What are acute and chronic hepatitis B?

Acute HBV infection is a short-term illness that occurs in the first six months of exposure to virus.

Chronic HBV infection is a long term illness that occurs when the virus stays in a person's body. Chronic HBV infection can last a lifetime if not treated.

What are the signs and symptoms of hepatitis B?

Many people infected with HBV do not know they are infected because they do not look or feel sick. Approximately 30-50% of newly infected people over age five years experience symptoms, while children under age five years typically experience no symptoms. When symptoms do appear, they include fatigue, headaches, nausea, dark urine, jaundice, loss of appetite, and/or abdominal pain.

Approximately 90% of infants and 25-50% of children aged one to five years will develop chronic hepatitis B infection, while only 5% of people infected as adults will develop chronic infection. Approximately 25% of people infected during childhood and 15% of people infected as adults will die prematurely from liver cancer or cirrhosis (liver scarring).

How long can a person spread hepatitis B?

After exposure, symptoms usually appear in 60 to 150 days (average 90 days). Someone with hepatitis B is contagious as long as the hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg) is detectable in their blood.

Who is at risk for hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B testing is recommended for all pregnant women, people born in countries where hepatitis B is common, people who inject drugs, and household and sexual contacts of someone with hepatitis B.



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How is hepatitis B treated?

There is no specific treatment for acute cases. People with chronic hepatitis B should be evaluated for liver problems and monitored by a healthcare provider. Antiviral medications to limit or prevent liver disease are available.

How can you prevent hepatitis B?

The best way to prevent hepatitis B is to be vaccinated. Other ways to prevent infection include the following:

- Pregnant women should get a hepatitis B blood test.
- Infants born to HBV-infected mothers should get HBIG (hepatitis B immune globulin) and vaccine within 12 hours of birth.
- If you are having sex with more than one partner, use latex condoms correctly every time you have sex.
- Do not use intravenous (IV) drugs. Never share drugs, needles, or syringes.
- Do not share personal care items that might have blood on them (e.g., razors and toothbrushes).
- If you are a healthcare or public safety worker, always follow routine barrier precautions and safely handle needles and other sharps.
- Consider the risks if you are thinking about getting a tattoo or body piercing. You might get infected if the tools have someone else's blood on them or if the artist or piercer does not follow good health practices.
- If you are HBV positive, do not donate blood, plasma, organs, or tissue.

Make sure your shots are up to date. Hepatitis B vaccine can be obtained from the Sedgwick County Division of Health, 2716 West Central Avenue, Wichita, Kansas.

For More Information:
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