

Hepatitis B

What is it?

Hepatitis means swelling and irritation of the liver. Hepatitis can be caused by chemicals, drugs or viral infections. Hepatitis A, B and C are three types of viral hepatitis. This fact sheet is about hepatitis B.

How do I know if I have it?

A lot of people who have hepatitis B can't tell that they have it. This is because the signs are not very noticeable and then go away in a few weeks.

If there are symptoms they normally come up within 6 – 12 weeks of infection.

Symptoms include:

- Aches and pains
- Fever
- Feeling sick (Nausea)
- Not feeling hungry
- Belly pain
- Mild flu-like illness
- Vomiting
- Dark wee (urine)
- Tiredness (Fatigue)
- General aches and pains
- Yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice).

These symptoms last from days to a few weeks.

If swelling of the liver lasts at least 6 months it is called chronic hepatitis.

How did I get it?

The hepatitis B virus is transmitted in body fluids such as, blood, semen, saliva or vaginal fluid. It can be passed on from an infected person in the following ways:

- Passed on from mother to child during pregnancy or childbirth. Most people in Australia with chronic hepatitis B have had it since birth.
- Sex without a condom.
- Piercing through your skin with non-sterile equipment. This includes: sharing needles and other drug injecting equipment; needle stick injuries, non-professional tattooing; acupuncture; body piercing.
- Sharing toothbrushes, razors, sex toys or other items that may have blood or body fluids on them.
- If blood or body fluids from an infected person makes direct contact with an open wound of another person.

Hepatitis B is **not usually** passed on by casual contact.

This includes:

- Hugging or holding hands.
- Kissing on the cheek.

- Coughing or sneezing.
- Sharing food or drinks
- Sharing eating utensils such as spoons or chopsticks.

How can I make sure I don't get it?

The best way to prevent the spread of hepatitis B is to get vaccinated. The vaccination usually consists of 3 injections over 6 months. Vaccination is safe and reliable. Hepatitis B is now part of the infant vaccination program. Also in NSW young people at high school are being vaccinated. Hepatitis B vaccination is available from your local doctors.

Hepatitis B vaccination is also available and free at sexual health clinics or at other health services for people at higher risk of infection, such as:

- Aboriginal people.
- Men who have sex with men.
- People who have partners with hepatitis B
- Sex workers
- People from countries with high rates of infection
- HIV positive people
- Chronic Hepatitis C
- People who inject drugs
- People who have been in detention or jail
- Marginalised young people
- Household contacts of infected person

To reduce the risk of getting hepatitis B, it is important to:

- Use condoms during sex including oral sex.
- Use gloves to dress wounds and to clean up spills of blood and other body fluids.
- Do **not** share injecting equipment.
- Do **not** share razors, toothbrushes, sex toys and other personal care items.

Make sure you get regular health check-ups. This helps to make sure that if you do have infections they can be treated before they get worse.

How do I test for it?

Hepatitis B is diagnosed by a blood test. The tests can show if a person has been recently infected, if they have a chronic (ongoing) infection and if they've had hepatitis B in the past but are no longer infectious.

How can I get rid of it?

Most adults who get hepatitis B can completely get rid of the infection. However, about 5 to 10 people in every 100 infected do not clear the virus. They stay infectious for many years. This is called chronic hepatitis B infection.

If you have been exposed to hepatitis B, see your doctor straight away. An injection of a drug called immunoglobulin can be given after hepatitis B exposure, along with hepatitis B vaccination. This may stop the infection. The injection should be given within 72 hours of a needle stick injury. And within 14 days after a possible sexual exposure.

At the beginning of the infection you need to rest. You should also drink plenty of fluids and avoid alcohol and other drugs. If you still have hepatitis B 6 months after the injection then you have chronic hepatitis B.

There are treatments available to help manage certain cases of chronic hepatitis B. Depending on your blood results, your doctor may send you to a specialist to discuss treatment.

Telling partners / who do I need to tell and why?

Hepatitis B can be infectious for 6 months before you notice you have it. If you have hepatitis B it is important to tell people you think may be at risk. This is so that they can be treated with immunoglobulin if they need. Telling people who might be at risk is important so they can get tested. Getting tested for hepatitis B also helps stop the spread of the virus. Your doctor can help you decide who may be at risk.

This fact sheet is just some general information. If you are worried about your health go and see a doctor.

For more information or support visit:

For more information on STIs and safe sex visit the Play Safe website:

www.playsafe.health.nsw.gov.au

Sexual Health Info Link is a service that you can call up for information on STIs and sexual health. It's anonymous and non-judgemental. Call: 1800 451 624 or visit <https://www.shil.nsw.gov.au/>

“Let them know” allows you to send an anonymous messages to tell someone you've had sex with that they have come into contact with the infection: <http://www.letthemknow.org.au/>