

HEPATITIS B & SEXUAL HEALTH

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a liver disease that results from infection with the Hepatitis B virus. When first infected, people can develop an acute infection, which can range in severity from a very mild illness with few or no symptoms to a serious condition requiring hospitalization. **Acute** Hepatitis B refers to the first 6 months after someone is exposed to the Hepatitis B virus. Some people are able to fight the infection and clear the virus.

For others, the infection remains and leads to a “chronic,” or lifelong, infection. Over time, **chronic** Hepatitis B can cause serious health problems including liver damage, liver failure, and even liver cancer.

How is Hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B is usually spread when blood, semen, or other body fluids from a person infected with the Hepatitis B virus enter the body of someone who is not infected. This can happen through sexual contact with an infected person; sharing needles, syringes, or other equipment to inject drugs; or from an infected mother to her baby at birth.

Can Hepatitis B be spread through sex?

Yes. Hepatitis B is easily transmitted through sexual activity. In fact, sexual contact is the most common way Hepatitis B is spread in the United States. Hepatitis B is 50-100 times more infectious than HIV.

If you are sexually active, get vaccinated against Hepatitis B and talk to your health professional about your risk for STDs and HIV.



The best way to prevent Hepatitis B is to get vaccinated.

Can Hepatitis B be prevented?

Yes. The best way to prevent Hepatitis B is by getting vaccinated. For adults, the vaccine is usually given as a series of 3 shots over a period of 6 months. The entire series of shots is needed for long-term protection.

There is also a combination vaccine that protects against both Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B. People should talk to their health professional about which vaccine is best for them.

Who should be vaccinated against Hepatitis B?

The vaccine is safe and effective and recommended for sexually active adults, especially:

- People with multiple sex partners
- Anyone with a sexually transmitted disease (STD)
- Men who have sexual encounters with other men
- Anyone having sex with an infected partner

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What are the symptoms of Hepatitis B?

Many people with Hepatitis B do not have symptoms and do not know they are infected. If symptoms occur with acute infection, they usually appear within 3 months of exposure and can last anywhere from 2–12 weeks.

People can live with chronic Hepatitis B for decades without symptoms or feeling sick. If symptoms do appear, they are similar for both acute and chronic Hepatitis B and can include:

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Grey-colored stools
- Joint pain
- Jaundice

How would someone know if they have Hepatitis B?

Since people often have no symptoms, a specific blood test is the only way to know if you have Hepatitis B. Not everyone needs to get tested, so ask your doctor if you should get tested for Hepatitis B.

How is Hepatitis B treated?

Doctors usually recommend rest, adequate nutrition, fluids, and close medical monitoring to treat acute Hepatitis B. Several new treatments are available for chronic Hepatitis B that can significantly improve health and delay or reverse the effects of liver disease.



For more information

Talk to your health professional, call your health department, or visit www.cdc.gov/hepatitis.