



Hepatitis B is inflammation of the liver caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). Most adults who have hepatitis B will recover on their own. Hepatitis B can be either “acute” or “chronic.”

# Hepatitis B

**Acute Hepatitis B virus infection** is a short-term illness that occurs within the first 6 months after exposure to the Hepatitis B virus. Acute infection can — but does not always — lead to chronic infection.

**Chronic Hepatitis B virus infection** is a long-term illness that occurs when the Hepatitis B virus remains in a person's body.

## How is it spread?

Hepatitis B virus is spread by contact with body fluids that carry the virus, such as:

- ▶ Blood.
- ▶ Semen.
- ▶ Vaginal fluids.
- ▶ Other body fluids.

Contact with infected body fluids can spread hepatitis B. It is mostly spread by:

- ▶ Sexual contact: (This is the most common way it is spread in the U.S.).
  - Vaginal and anal sex.
  - Sharing unclean sex toys.
  - Body fluids with hepatitis B can enter tiny breaks or rips in the linings of the vagina, vulva, rectum, or mouth. Rips and tears in these areas can be common and often unnoticed.
- ▶ Needle sharing:
  - Used or unclean needles.
  - During illegal drug or drug equipment use.

- ▶ Contact with blood:
  - Open sores of an infected person.
  - Sharing items such as razors or toothbrushes with an infected person.
  - Being tattooed or pierced with tools that were not properly cleaned.
  - During occupational exposures to needles, splashes of blood, and body fluids.
  - During blood transfusions given before 1975 (since then all blood is screened).
- ▶ You may have hepatitis B from before you were born:
  - Hepatitis B can spread to babies during pregnancy, birth, and during breastfeeding.
- ▶ There is no risk of getting hepatitis B when **donating** or **giving** blood.



**Men are 6 times more likely to become chronic carriers**

### Who is at risk of hepatitis B?

Anyone can get hepatitis B. However, in the U.S., you may be at a higher risk if you:

- ▶ Have not been vaccinated for hepatitis B.
- ▶ Have sex partners that have hepatitis B.
- ▶ Have HIV or hepatitis C.
- ▶ Share needles, syringes, or other drug-injection equipment.
- ▶ Live with someone who has hepatitis B.
- ▶ Have a weak immune system.
- ▶ Have diabetes.
- ▶ Work in health care or public safety and are exposed to blood or body fluids on the job.
- ▶ Are an infant born to an infected mother.
- ▶ Travel to areas that have moderate to high rates of hepatitis B (see: [wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2010/chapter-2/hepatitis-b.aspx#363](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2010/chapter-2/hepatitis-b.aspx#363)).
- ▶ Are a man who has sex with men.

### What are signs of hepatitis B?

When you first get hepatitis B, it is called **acute** hepatitis B. Most adults who have it will recover on their own. However, children and some adults can develop **chronic** (lifelong) hepatitis B.

**Acute hepatitis B:** Signs of acute hepatitis B can appear within 3 months after you get the virus. These signs may last from several weeks to 6 months. Most adults have signs of acute hepatitis B virus infection. Many young children do not show any signs. Signs include:

- ▶ Yellow skin or eyes (jaundice).
- ▶ Tiredness.
- ▶ Fever.
- ▶ Nausea.
- ▶ Vomiting.
- ▶ Loss of appetite.
- ▶ Stomach pain.
- ▶ Light stools.
- ▶ Dark urine.
- ▶ Joint pain.

**Chronic hepatitis B:** Hepatitis B is chronic when the body can't get rid of the virus. Children, mostly infants, are more likely to get chronic hepatitis B than adults. People with chronic hepatitis B may have no signs for as long as 20 or 30 years. Signs may be the same as acute hepatitis B. There may also be signs of liver damage and cirrhosis such as:

- ▶ Weakness.
- ▶ Weight loss.
- ▶ Small, red, spider-like blood vessels on the skin.
- ▶ Confusion or problems thinking.
- ▶ Loss of interest in sex.
- ▶ Swollen stomach or ankles.
- ▶ A longer than normal amount of time for bleeding to stop.

## How do you know if you have hepatitis B?

The only way to know if you have hepatitis B is by seeing a health care provider (HCP). S/he may take a sample of your blood. There are several blood tests to see:

- ▶ If it is an acute or a chronic infection.
- ▶ If you have recovered from infection.
- ▶ If you are immune to hepatitis B.
- ▶ If you could benefit from vaccination.

## How is it treated?

**Acute hepatitis B:** Your HCP may suggest rest, good nutrition, and fluids. S/he may give you a type of protein that may help fight the virus. Some people may need to go to the hospital.

**Chronic hepatitis B:** People with chronic hepatitis B should seek care from a HCP experienced in treating hepatitis B. These can be:

- ▶ Some primary care providers.
- ▶ Infection specialists.
- ▶ Gastroenterologists (digestive system specialists).
- ▶ Hepatologists (liver specialists).

If you have chronic hepatitis B, get checked regularly for signs of liver damage. Talk with your HCP about treatment. Not every person with chronic hepatitis B needs treatment. If you show no signs of liver damage, your provider will continue to check for liver problems.

## What can happen if chronic hepatitis B is not treated?

Chronic hepatitis B is a serious disease that can result in long-term health problems. Up to 1 in 4 people with it have serious liver problems. These include:

- ▶ Liver damage and scarring (cirrhosis).
- ▶ Liver failure.
- ▶ Liver cancer.
- ▶ Death.



Human Liver

## If you have hepatitis B:

- ▶ See your health care provider regularly.
- ▶ Tell current and recent sex partners that you have hepatitis B.
- ▶ Get plenty of rest.
- ▶ Eat healthy foods.
- ▶ Drink plenty of fluids.
- ▶ Avoid drinking any alcohol. There are ways to help you stop drinking alcohol at: [www.hepatitis.va.gov/patient/alcohol/what-you-can-do](http://www.hepatitis.va.gov/patient/alcohol/what-you-can-do), <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/res-vatreatmentprograms.asp> or <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/res-vatreatmentprograms.asp>.

- ▶ Check with your HCP before taking:
  - Prescription medicines.
  - Vitamins or supplements.
  - Over-the-counter drugs.
- ▶ Avoid spreading hepatitis B to others by:
  - Having safer sex and using condoms during all sexual contact.
  - Not sharing used or unclean needles and sex toys.
  - Not donating blood, blood products, or organs.
  - Cleaning all blood spills – even those that have already dried. Use a mixture of bleach and water (one part household bleach to 10 parts water). Even dried blood is a risk to others.
  - Not sharing personal care items like razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers or earrings.
  - Not sharing glucose-monitoring equipment.
  - Asking sexual partner(s) and people living in close contact with you to be tested and vaccinated.



For more information, see *Safer Sex* on page 71

## How can you avoid hepatitis B?

**Getting the vaccine for hepatitis B is the best way to prevent it.** The vaccine is safe and effective. It can take 3-4 shots over a 6-month period. You **will not** get hepatitis B from the vaccine. Ask your HCP if you should get this vaccine. It is recommended for adults if you:

- ▶ Have sex with or live in the same house as a person with hepatitis B virus infection.
- ▶ Have sex with more than one partner.
- ▶ Seek care in a clinic for sexually transmitted diseases, HIV testing or treatment, or drug treatment.
- ▶ Are a man who has sex with other men.
- ▶ Inject drugs.

- ▶ Have a job that involves contact with human blood.
- ▶ Are on the staff of, or a client in, a facility for the developmentally disabled.
- ▶ Are a hemodialysis patient or have end-stage renal disease.
- ▶ Have HIV infection.
- ▶ Are a dialysis patient.
- ▶ Have chronic liver disease.
- ▶ Have diabetes and are under age 60.
- ▶ Seek care in a clinic for sexually transmitted diseases, HIV testing, or drug treatment.
- ▶ Live or travel for more than 6 months a year in countries where hepatitis B is common (see [wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2010/chapter-2/hepatitis-b.aspx#363](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2010/chapter-2/hepatitis-b.aspx#363)).

#### **Travelers at increased risk for infection include:**

- ▶ Adventure travelers.
- ▶ Peace Corps volunteers.
- ▶ Missionaries.
- ▶ Military personnel.

#### **Theses may raise the risk for hepatitis B for travelers:**

- ▶ An injury or illness that breaks the skin such as shots, fluids in the vein, transfusion, stitches, and surgery.
- ▶ Dental treatment.
- ▶ Unprotected sexual contact.
- ▶ Sharing syringes or drug injection equipment.
- ▶ Tattooing, ear piercing, or acupuncture that break the skin.
- ▶ Manicures and pedicures which may break the skin.
- ▶ Sharing certain items such as earrings, razors, toothbrushes and nail clippers.

#### **Other ways to avoid hepatitis B:**

- ▶ Avoid sexual contact.
- ▶ Have safer sex:
  - Reduce the number of sexual partners.
  - Condoms, when used correctly, can reduce the risk of getting hepatitis B. Each time you have sex use a condom (male or female type):
    - During vaginal sex.
    - During anal sex.
    - During oral sex.
  - Have sex with only one partner who does not have sex with others and does not have hepatitis B.
- ▶ Know that other forms of birth control do not protect against hepatitis B.
- ▶ Not using or injecting drugs.
- ▶ Not reusing or sharing syringes or drug equipment.
- ▶ Wear gloves if you have to touch another person's blood.
- ▶ Do not use another person's toothbrush, razor, nail clippers or any other item that might have even a tiny bit of blood on it.
- ▶ Make sure any tattoos or body piercings are done under good conditions, using:
  - Sterile tools.
  - Clean hands and single use gloves.
  - Disinfected work surfaces.

**The hepatitis B vaccine is the best way to prevent hepatitis B.**



## **Learn more:**

**Department of Veterans Affairs (VA):**

**Hepatitis B Basics**

[www.hepatitis.va.gov/patient/basics/hepatitisB-index.asp](http://www.hepatitis.va.gov/patient/basics/hepatitisB-index.asp)

**Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):**

**Hepatitis B Information for the Public**

[www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/B/](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/B/)

**Infectious Diseases Related to Travel; Hepatitis B**

[wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2010/chapter-2/hepatitis-b.aspx#363/](http://wwwnc.cdc.gov/travel/yellowbook/2010/chapter-2/hepatitis-b.aspx#363/)

**Protect Your Baby for Life; When a Pregnant Woman Has Hepatitis B**

[www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HBV/PDFs/HepBPerinatal-ProtectWhenPregnant-BW.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HBV/PDFs/HepBPerinatal-ProtectWhenPregnant-BW.pdf)

**National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID/NIH):**

**Hepatitis B**

[www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/hepatitis/hepatitisb/Pages/Default.aspx](http://www.niaid.nih.gov/topics/hepatitis/hepatitisb/Pages/Default.aspx)

**National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK/NIH):**

**What I need to know about Hepatitis B**

[digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/hepb\\_ez/](http://digestive.niddk.nih.gov/ddiseases/pubs/hepb_ez/)

**U.S. National Library of Medicine:**

**Cirrhosis**

[www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001301/](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmedhealth/PMH0001301/)