

Hepatitis B

What is Hepatitis B



Hepatitis B is a contagious liver disease that results from infection with the Hepatitis B virus. When first infected, a person 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 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, illness. **Chronic** Hepatitis B refers to the illness that occurs when the Hepatitis B virus remains in a person’s body. Over time, the infection can cause serious health problems.

In the United States, approximately 1.2 million people have chronic Hepatitis B. Unfortunately, many people do not know they are infected. The number of new cases of Hepatitis B has decreased more than 80% over the last 20 years. An estimated 40,000 people now become infected each year. Many experts believe this decline is a result of widespread vaccination of children.

Spread of Disease

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 or sharing needles, syringes, or other injection drug equipment. Hepatitis B can also be passed from an infected mother to her baby.

Hepatitis B is not spread through breastfeeding, sharing eating utensils, hugging, kissing, holding hands, coughing, or sneezing. Unlike some forms of hepatitis, Hepatitis B is also not spread by contaminated food or water.

In the United States, Hepatitis B is most commonly spread through sexual contact. The Hepatitis B virus is 50-100 times more infectious than HIV and can be passed through the exchange of body fluids, such as semen, vaginal fluids, and blood.

Signs and Symptoms

Not everyone has symptoms with acute Hepatitis B, especially young children. Most adults have symptoms that appear within 3 months of exposure. Symptoms can last from a few weeks to several months and include:

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

Many people with chronic Hepatitis B do not have symptoms and do not know they are infected. Even though a person has no symptoms, the virus can still be detected in the blood. Symptoms of chronic Hepatitis

B can take up to 30 years to develop. Damage to the liver can silently occur during this time. When symptoms do appear, they are similar to acute infection and can be a sign of advanced liver disease.

Diagnosis

Hepatitis B is diagnosed with specific blood tests that are not part of blood work typically done during regular physical exams.

Treatment

For acute Hepatitis B, doctors usually recommend rest, adequate nutrition, fluids, and close medical monitoring. Some people may need to be hospitalized. Those living with chronic Hepatitis B should be evaluated for liver problems and monitored on a regular basis. Even though a person may not have symptoms or feel sick, damage to the liver can still occur. Several new treatments are available that can significantly improve health and delay or reverse the effects of liver disease.

People at Risk

Although anyone can get Hepatitis B, some people are at greater risk, such as those who:

- Have sexual contact with an infected person
- Have multiple sex partners
- Have a sexually transmitted disease
- Are men who have sexual encounters with other men
- Inject drugs or share needles, syringes, or other injection equipment
- Live with a person who has Hepatitis B
- Are on Hemodialysis
- Are exposed to blood on the job
- Are infants born to infected mothers



For more sources of information on this topic visit:

ST. CLAIR COUNTY HEALTH DEPARTMENT www.scchealth.co

MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES www.michigan.gov/mdhhs

CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION www.cdc.gov