

PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

Hepatitis B

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a contagious liver disease that ranges in severity from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a serious, lifelong illness. It results from infection with the Hepatitis B virus. Hepatitis B can be either “acute” or “chronic.”

Acute Hepatitis B virus infection is a short-term illness that occurs within the first 6 months after someone is exposed 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.

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis B?

- There may be no symptoms of acute Hepatitis B **or**
- Symptoms may include fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, clay-colored bowel movements, joint pain, or jaundice (yellow color in the skin or eyes).

How is Hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B is spread when blood, semen, or other body fluid from a person infected with Hepatitis B virus enters the body of someone who is not infected. People can become infected with the virus during activities such as:

- Birth (spread from an infected mother to her baby during birth)
- Sex with an infected partner
- Sharing needles, syringes, or other drug-injection equipment
- Sharing items such as razors or toothbrushes with an infected person
- Direct contact with the blood or open sores of an infected person
- Exposure to blood from needle sticks or other sharp instruments

It is important to remember that Hepatitis B virus is a hardy organism and can survive on environmental surfaces for seven days in blood or body fluid visible or invisible in microscopic particles of dried blood present on commonly shared household items such as; nail clippers, tooth brushes, metal nail files, pierced body jewelry, and other sharp items.

Is there a test for Hepatitis B?

A blood test can be done to find out if a person is infected with Hepatitis B.

How long after exposure do symptoms begin?

On average, symptoms appear 90 days (or 3 months) after exposure, but they can appear any time between 6 weeks and 6 months after exposure.

How long do acute Hepatitis B symptoms last?

Symptoms usually last a few weeks, but some people can be ill for as long as 6 months

How serious is chronic Hepatitis B?

Chronic Hepatitis B is a serious disease that can result in long-term health problems, including liver damage, liver failure, liver cancer, or even death. Chronic carriers of Hepatitis B virus may not have symptoms themselves, but they can pass the virus to others.

What are ways Hepatitis B is not spread?

Hepatitis B virus is not spread by sharing eating utensils, breastfeeding, hugging, kissing, holding hands, coughing, or sneezing.

If I had Hepatitis B in the past, can I get it again?

No, once you recover from Hepatitis B, you develop antibodies that protect you from the virus for life.

Is there a treatment for Hepatitis B?

There is no specific treatment for acute Hepatitis B. For adults with chronic Hepatitis B, consult a doctor with experience treating Hepatitis B. If you are diagnosed with hepatitis B, you should receive vaccines to protect your liver, such hepatitis A vaccine and hepatitis B vaccine.

How can Hepatitis B be prevented?

The best way to prevent Hepatitis B is by getting the Hepatitis B vaccine. The Hepatitis B vaccine is safe and effective and is usually given as 3-4 shots over a 6-month period.

What if a pregnant woman has Hepatitis B?

If a pregnant woman has Hepatitis B, she can pass the infection to her baby during birth. But this can be prevented through a series of vaccinations and HBIG for her baby beginning at birth. Without vaccination, babies born to women with Hepatitis B virus infection can develop chronic infection, which can lead to serious health problems.

Do babies need the Hepatitis B vaccine even if a pregnant woman does not have Hepatitis B?

Yes. The Hepatitis B vaccine is recommended for all infants. CDC recommends that the infant get the first shot before leaving the hospital

For more information on Hepatitis B, call (816) 325-7204

For additional copies, visit our website at <http://www.ci.independence.mo.us/Health/>

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