

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis B infection is a serious liver infection caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). HBV infection may be either short-lived (acute) or long-lasting (chronic). Having chronic hepatitis B increases your risk of developing liver failure, liver cancer or cirrhosis — a condition that permanently scars the liver.

Most adults with HBV infection recover fully, even if their signs and symptoms are severe. Infants and children are more likely to develop a chronic HBV infection.

How is hepatitis B spread?

The virus is passed from person to person through blood, semen or other body fluids. It is not spread by sneezing or coughing, breastfeeding, or through contaminated food or water. 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.

Can a person spread hepatitis B and not know it?

Yes. Many people with chronic HBV infection do not know they are infected since they do not feel or look sick. However, they still can spread the virus to others and are at risk of serious health problems themselves.

What are the signs and symptoms of hepatitis B infection?

Signs and symptoms of HBV infection range from mild to severe. Some people, usually young children, may not have any symptoms. Hepatitis B symptoms may include:

- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Fever
- Joint pain
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea and vomiting
- Weakness and fatigue
- Yellowing of your skin and the whites of your eyes (jaundice)

How long after infection do symptoms appear?

On average, symptoms usually appear 90 days (or 3 months) after exposure, but can appear any time between 6 weeks and 6 months after exposure. Symptoms usually last a few weeks, but some people can be ill for as long as 6 months.

Who is most at risk?

The following groups are at increased risk of HBV infection:

- Household and sexual contacts of HBV-infected persons
- People who inject drugs or share needles, syringes, or other drug equipment
- Men who have sex with other men
- People who have jobs that exposes them to human blood
- People living with someone who has a chronic HBV infection
- Infants born to an infected mother
- Hemodialysis patients
- Travelers to countries with moderate to high rates of hepatitis B.

What type of health problems are caused by HBV infection?

Over time, chronic HBV infection can cause serious health problems, including liver damage, cirrhosis, liver cancer, and even death.

How is HBV infection diagnosed?

Blood tests can detect signs of HBV in your body and determine whether it is acute or chronic. A blood test can also determine if a person has been infected and cleared the virus, is currently infected, or has never been infected. All pregnant women should be tested for HBV infection.

How is HBV infection treated?

There is no medication available to treat acute HBV infection. During this short-term infection, your healthcare provider will usually recommend rest, adequate nutrition, and fluids, although some people may need to be hospitalized.

Most people diagnosed with chronic HBV infection need treatment for the rest of their lives. Treatment helps reduce the risk of liver disease and prevents you from passing the infection to others. Treatment for chronic HBV infection may include antiviral medications, interferon injections, and liver transplant.

How can HBV infection be prevented?

The best way to prevent HBV infection is by getting vaccinated. The hepatitis B vaccine is typically given as a series of 3 or 4 injections over 6 months. The entire series is needed for long-term protection. You can't get HBV infection from the vaccine. The hepatitis B vaccine is recommended for:

- Newborns
- People living with someone infected with hepatitis B
- People who are incarcerated
- Travelers to certain countries
- Healthcare and public safety workers exposed to blood
- People with high-risk sexual behaviors
- Men who have sex with men
- People who inject drugs
- People with certain medical conditions, including HIV, diabetes, and hepatitis C virus infection.

Where can I get more information?

- Your personal healthcare provider
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#)
- [Utah Department of Health](#)

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