
Hepatitis B

What is Hepatitis B?

It is an inflammation of the liver caused by the Hepatitis B virus (HBV).

What are the Symptoms?

After the virus enters your body, it can take anywhere from 45 - 180 days to develop symptoms. Some people will not develop symptoms at all. Most people who become infected with Hepatitis B remain well and symptom free. About 5-10% of adults develop chronic disease that can lead to cirrhosis (scarring) and cancer of the liver later in life.

Symptoms may include:

- Weakness
- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal discomfort
- Dark urine
- Jaundice (a yellowing of the skin and eyes)

How is it Spread?

It is spread through infected blood or bodily fluids, such as semen, vaginal secretions or saliva. These infected fluids must enter a person's blood system through an open cut, intravenously or through mucous membranes, such as the mouth or vagina.

Babies born to mothers who are Hepatitis B carriers have a 90% chance of developing the disease unless they are vaccinated immediately after birth.

What is a Hepatitis B Carrier?

The majority of people who become infected with Hepatitis B recover completely and develop lifelong immunity. However, around 6-10% of adults and 90% of infants who get infected with the hepatitis B virus cannot get rid of the virus; they are considered carriers. Most carriers are healthy and symptom free but can transmit the hepatitis B virus to other people.

— *Health & Environment Facts* —

Who is at Risk of Getting Hepatitis B?

- Babies born to mothers who are Hepatitis B carriers.
- Household members and sexual partners of infected individuals.
- People in occupations in which there is increased exposure to blood and bodily fluids (health care workers, law enforcement officers, etc.).
- People who use injection drugs or share drug-related equipment.
- Those receiving repeated infusions of blood or blood products.
- Hemodialysis patients.
- People with multiple sexual partners.
- People who come from parts of the world that have high rates of Hepatitis B (Asia, Africa, southern and eastern Europe, and the Pacific Islands). These are known as endemic countries.
- International travellers to Hepatitis B endemic areas for longer than 6 months.
- People with tattoos and piercings acquired with non-sterile equipment.

Prevention

- Immunization against Hepatitis B can be obtained with a series of three injections over a six month period.
- Screening all pregnant women and immunizing babies born to mothers who are Hepatitis B carriers.
- Adopting safer sex practices.
- Hepatitis B immune globulin given to those who have had recent contact (seven days or less) with infected body fluids and are not immunized.
- Never sharing toothbrushes, razors, nail files, or others items that may contain traces of blood.
- Standard precautions when handling body fluids.
- All grade 7 students are offered free Hepatitis B immunization.

How is Hepatitis B Diagnosed?

Diagnosis is made through a blood test.

For more information please contact the health unit at 376-9420 or 1-800-263-3456.