

If you have chronic hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection . . .

If you have chronic hepatitis B virus (HBV) infection, you are not alone. Today, approximately one million people in the United States are chronically infected with HBV. The majority of infected people feel healthy for their entire lives and do not have any evidence of ongoing liver damage. Other people progress to levels of more severe disease. Some people ultimately develop liver scarring (cirrhosis), liver failure, or liver cancer. It is important that you take care of yourself. And because it is possible to spread HBV to others, you have to know how to protect your family, friends, and others from this disease.

How you can take care of yourself

People who have chronic HBV infection need regular monitoring of their liver condition to determine whether their disease is progressing, whether treatment is needed, or whether a liver cancer is developing. Make sure you do the following:

- ◆ See your doctor for evaluation of your liver's condition once or twice a year. Certain blood tests need to be performed periodically to monitor your liver's health. Discuss with your doctor if you are a candidate for antiviral medication. These medicines are given to certain people with chronic liver disease.
- ◆ Discuss with your doctor about getting periodic ultrasounds, alpha-fetoprotein (AFP) blood tests, or other studies to make sure there is no evidence of a developing liver cancer. Physicians may recommend different schedules for ultrasounds and blood tests depending on the patient's age, sex, ethnicity, age at which the infection was initially acquired, family history, liver enzymes and HBeAg status (a positive HBeAg blood test indicates more HBV in the blood and a greater chance of serious liver disease). Usually, ultrasounds and blood tests are recommended every six to 12 months.
- ◆ Review with your physician *all* medications you take. Even some "over-the-counter" medications can injure your liver.
- ◆ If you are pregnant, tell your physician that you have chronic HBV infection. It is essential that your baby be given an injection of hepatitis B immune globulin (HBIG) and started on the hepatitis B vaccine series within 12 hours of birth to prevent your baby from getting HBV infection.
- ◆ Avoid alcoholic beverages. Alcohol can damage your liver.

If your liver disease progresses, here are some extra precautions you should take:

- ◆ Get your yearly influenza vaccine. Patients with severe liver disease should also receive pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine.
- ◆ Get vaccinated against hepatitis A. Hepatitis A can further damage your liver.
- ◆ Don't eat raw oysters. Raw oysters may carry the bacteria *Vibrio vulnificus* which can cause a serious blood infection in individuals with liver disease. Approximately 40% of these cases are fatal.

How to protect others from HBV infection

People can get HBV infection from you by coming in contact with your blood, serum, semen, or vaginal fluids. HBV has also been transmitted by human bites. Although HBV has been detected in low concentrations in other body fluids, including tears, sweat, urine, feces, and breast milk, these fluids have not been associated with known transmission. Fortunately, HBV is *not* transmitted by sneezing or coughing, or from casual contact such as holding hands. Here are some important guidelines for you to follow so that others are protected:

- ◆ Tell your sex partner(s) that you are infected with HBV. Your sex partner(s) must see a physician for hepatitis B blood testing and should receive the first dose of hepatitis B vaccine at this same visit after the blood is drawn. If, according to the blood tests, your partner has never had hepatitis B, your partner should complete the vaccination series. One to two months after the series of three shots is completed, your partner needs to return to the doctor for blood testing to make sure the vaccine protected your partner. Use condoms correctly and consistently until your partner is proven to be protected from HBV.
- ◆ Make sure *all* your household members see their physicians for hepatitis B testing and vaccination.
- ◆ Tell your healthcare professionals that you are infected with HBV.
- ◆ Cover all cuts and open sores with a bandage.
- ◆ Throw away used personal items such as tissues or menstrual pads in a bag that does not leak so others will not be exposed to your blood.
- ◆ Wash your hands well after touching your blood or body fluids.
- ◆ Clean up your blood spills. Then re-clean the area with bleach solution (one part

regular household bleach to 10 parts water).

- ◆ Do not share toothbrushes, razors, needles for ear piercing, nail files, clippers, nail scissors, washcloths, or anything that may have come in contact with your blood or body fluids.
- ◆ Do not share food that has been in your mouth (e.g., chewing gum) and do not pre-chew food for babies.
- ◆ Do not share syringes, needles, drugs, or any drug preparation equipment.
- ◆ Do not donate blood, plasma, body organs, tissue, or sperm.
- ◆ Know that if someone is exposed to your blood—be it a family member, a friend, or even a stranger—*preventive treatment is available* for that person. If the exposed person receives HBIG and starts the hepatitis B vaccine series right away (or within 7–14 days, depending on the type of exposure), that person has an excellent chance of being protected from HBV!
- ◆ Learn more about hepatitis B so you can make the best decisions for yourself and provide the best protection for your family and friends.

More resources...

If you have further questions, contact one of these trusted resources:

Immunization Action Coalition
(651) 647-9009
www.immunize.org

American Liver Foundation
(212) 668-1000
www.liverfoundation.org

Asian Liver Center, Stanford University
(888) 311-3331
<http://liver.stanford.edu/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
(800) 232-4636
www.cdc.gov/hepatitis

Hepatitis B Foundation
(215) 489-4900
www.hepb.org

Hepatitis Foundation International
(800) 891-0707
www.hepfi.org

National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse
(301) 496-3583
www2.niddk.nih.gov

Parents of Kids with Infectious Diseases (PKIDS)
(877) 557-5437
www.pkids.org