

Every Week Hundreds of People Get Hepatitis B

GET PROTECTED! GET VACCINATED!

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a liver infection caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). HBV is spread much like HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. HBV is found in the blood, semen, and vaginal secretions of an infected person. HBV is easier to catch than HIV because it can be 100 times more concentrated in an infected person's blood.

Is sex the only way I can get infected with HBV?

No. Hepatitis B is a sexually transmitted disease, but it is spread in other ways, too. Hepatitis B is a hardy virus that can exist on most surfaces for at least 7 days. You can get infected through contact with an infected person's blood or body fluids. Hepatitis B can be spread in the following ways:

- unprotected vaginal or anal sex
- living in a household with a person with chronic (life-long) hepatitis B infection
- sharing personal care items such as toothbrushes, razors, or nail clippers
- a mother passing hepatitis B to her newborn during birth
- sharing needles or paraphernalia (works) for drug use
- tattooing or body piercing with unsterile equipment
- human bites

You do not get hepatitis B from sneezing, coughing, kissing, or holding hands.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis B?

Only about half of the people who are infected with hepatitis B virus get symptoms. Symptoms might include:

- yellowing of skin and whites of eyes
- dark-colored urine
- loss of appetite or nausea
- bloated and tender belly
- extreme tiredness
- fever
- pain in joints

Many people who get hepatitis B do not develop any symptoms at all, but some of them will carry the virus in their bodies for the rest of their lives.



How serious is infection with HBV?

Infection with hepatitis B virus can cause life-long (chronic) infection that can lead to liver scarring (cirrhosis) and liver cancer. Many people in the United States die every year from hepatitis B-related liver disease. Fortunately, there is a vaccine to prevent this disease.

Do people fully recover?

Most adults who get infected will fully recover. However, about 2 of 100 adults will remain infectious and carry hepatitis B virus in their bodies for life. This is called chronic infection. Chronically infected people do not necessarily look or feel ill, but they are at increased risk for liver failure and liver cancer and need ongoing medical care. They can also spread the virus to others.

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How do I know if I’ve already been infected?

The only way to know if you’ve ever been infected with hepatitis B virus is to have blood tests.

How do I protect myself from getting infected?

Get vaccinated against hepatitis B! Two or three shots are needed depending on the brand of vaccine that you receive.

Tell your sex partner(s) to get vaccinated too, and always follow “safer sex” practices (e.g., using condoms).

Who should get hepatitis B vaccine?

The following groups of people should get vaccinated against hepatitis B:

- Everyone 0–18 years of age
- Anyone who wants to be protected from hepatitis B
- Sexually active people who are not in long-term, mutually monogamous relationships
- Men who have sex with men
- Anyone seeking evaluation or treatment for a sexually transmitted disease
- Healthcare or public safety workers who might be exposed to blood or body fluids
- Residents and staff of facilities for developmentally disabled people
- People with diabetes who are younger than 60 years old. People older than 60 should discuss the vaccine with their healthcare provider
- Dialysis and pre-dialysis patients
- People infected with HIV
- People in close personal contact (i.e., household or sexual) with someone who has chronic hepatitis B infection
- Current or recent injection-drug users
- Travelers to areas of the world where hepatitis B is common (Asia, Africa, the Amazon Basin in South America, the Pacific Islands, Eastern Europe, or the Middle East);
- People with chronic liver disease

Should I get my blood tested for hepatitis B before I get vaccinated?

Talk to your healthcare provider about whether you should have your blood tested. Most people do not need blood tests. If you and your provider decide you need testing, get your blood drawn, then get the first dose of the hepatitis B vaccine series at the same visit. That way, you will be closer to being protected from hepatitis B infection. Hepatitis B vaccine will not cause you harm if you are already infected or were infected in the past.

Will hepatitis B vaccine protect me from hepatitis A or hepatitis C?

No. Hepatitis A and hepatitis C are different liver diseases caused by different viruses. There is a vaccine for hepatitis A, but there is no vaccine for hepatitis C. For information on hepatitis A and hepatitis C, talk to your healthcare provider, call your local health department, or visit CDC’s hepatitis website at www.cdc.gov/hepatitis.

How can I pay for these shots?

If you have insurance, the cost of hepatitis B vaccination will likely be covered. If not, sometimes these shots are available free or at low cost through special clinics or health departments. Call your local or state health department for details. And while you’re at it, find out what other vaccinations you need, too!

You can access a listing of telephone numbers for state immunization programs at www.immunize.org/coordinators.

