

# Hepatitis B

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## What is Hepatitis B? (HBV)

Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. It can be caused by many things, including drugs, toxins, alcohol and viruses. Hepatitis B (HBV) is a virus that causes infection of the liver. It is a sexually transmitted virus that attacks the liver. Most people recover and their bodies get rid of the virus. But Hepatitis B may cause serious liver damage or even liver cancer. Fortunately, there is a vaccine that prevents HBV.

## How many people get Hepatitis B?

There are 100 to 200 newly diagnosed acute hepatitis B cases in Washington each year and an estimated 20,000 persons chronically infected.

## How is Hepatitis B transmitted?

- The virus lives in the liver and is present in the blood and certain body fluids.
- Spread occurs through contact with virus-containing blood and body fluids, such as sharing of injection drug equipment, sexual contact (homosexual and heterosexual), during childbirth, household contact with a person who has hepatitis B, and sharing of personal hygiene items (such as nail clippers, razors, toothbrushes).
- **The amount of virus is highest in blood and serous fluid** (yellowish or clear fluid that drains from cuts/sores) but is also present in smaller amounts in semen, vaginal fluids, and menstrual blood.
- Although small amounts of virus can be found in saliva, saliva is **not** likely to spread hepatitis B, *unless saliva from an infected person gets into a cut or sore, for example, following a bite.*

## Hepatitis B is not spread by kissing or sneezing

## What are the symptoms for Hepatitis B and what happens if I have it?

- Symptoms usually begin 6 weeks to 6 months after exposure to the virus (average 2 months). The duration of illness varies; most people recover within 3 weeks.
- In adults, early symptoms can include nausea (upset stomach), loss of appetite, vomiting, fatigue, and abdominal cramps (stomach or side pain).
- Dark yellow or brown urine, pale or white-colored stools (bowel movements), and jaundice (yellow eyes or skin) may also be present.
- Persons can have all or only a few of the above signs and symptoms.
- **Nearly all infants and children and 50% of adults with a new infection have no symptoms whatsoever.**
- Over 90% of infants, 50% of children, and 5% of adults with acute hepatitis B will develop chronic or long-term infection.
- Chronic HBV may lead to liver disease including cirrhosis and liver cancer.

## How do I avoid getting Hepatitis B?

- If you use injection drugs, do not share needles, drugs, mixing solution, tourniquets, or works.

- Practice safe sex: use condoms for any sexual activity, including oral, anal, and vaginal sex.
- Do not share personal hygiene items, such as razors, nail clippers or files, toothbrushes, or washcloths.
- Cover all cuts and open sores with a bandage.
- **Hepatitis B vaccine** provides protection against hepatitis B for many years. The vaccination series consists of 3 doses given over 6 months.

### **Who should get Hepatitis B vaccine?**

- All babies and children 19 years of age or younger.
- Gay and bisexual men.
- Anyone with more than one sex partner in a 6 month period.
- Illicit drug users (injection and non-injection).
- International travelers to areas where hepatitis B is common (includes all areas of the world except Canada, Western Europe & Scandinavia, New Zealand & Australia.)
- Health care and public safety workers with exposure to blood in the workplace.
- Persons with chronic liver disease, including hepatitis C.
- Household contacts and sexual partners of persons with hepatitis B.
- Persons born in countries with high rates of hepatitis B and their family members.
- Persons with clotting factor disorders, such as hemophiliacs.
- Clients in institutions for the developmentally disabled.
- Alaska Natives and Pacific Islanders.
- Patients receiving chronic kidney dialysis (hemodialysis).
- Anyone else who wants protection against hepatitis B.

### **How do I find out if I have Hepatitis B?**

- Hepatitis B is diagnosed with blood tests.
- There is no medicine or treatment for acute hepatitis B.
- Rest, a low fat diet, and plenty of fluids are recommended. Avoid drugs and alcohol during any acute (new) illness.

### **What is Hepatitis B immune globulin (HBIG)?**

- Hepatitis B immune globulin (HBIG) is a blood plasma product that can prevent hepatitis B if given within 14 days of an exposure to an infected individual.
- HBIG is effective 85-90% of the time and protects against hepatitis B for about 3 months.
- HBIG is necessary if the exposed person has not been vaccinated against hepatitis B and has never had a hepatitis B infection.
- HBIG is given in combination with the 3 dose hepatitis B vaccine series after exposure to the blood or sexual body fluids of a person with hepatitis B.
- HBIG and hepatitis B vaccine may be recommended for you if you have had sexual contact or a blood exposure from someone who has hepatitis B.

**For more help**

- Washington State HIV/HEPC/STD hotline - (800) 272-AIDS (2437) - Testing and treatment resources and information.
- American Social Health Association STI Resource Center - (919) 361-8488 - STI/STD information.
- Centers for Disease Control National STD/HIV Hotline - (800) CDC-INFO (232-4636) Spanish (800) 344-7432, TTY (800) 243-7889 - General information on many health topics including STDs and HIV.

**More information**

- [Hepatitis B: Questions and answers](#) (American Social Health Association)
- [Hepatitis B information](#) (Centers for Disease Control)
- [Hepatitis B fact sheet](#) (Washington State Department of Health)
- [Hepatitis B information](#) (Planned Parenthood)

