



What I need to know about Hepatitis B

This document was produced on behalf of the [Memphis Gastroenterology Group](#).

Reprinted from the National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse.

What I need to know about Hepatitis B

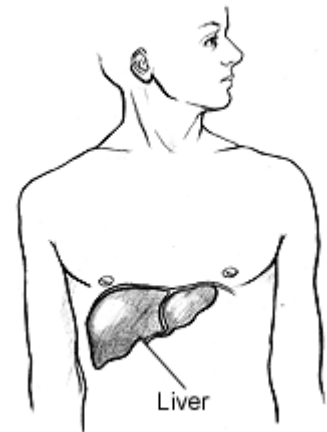
What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a liver disease.

Hepatitis (HEP-ah-TY-tis) makes your liver swell and stops it from working right.

You need a healthy liver. The liver does many things to keep you alive. The liver fights infections and stops bleeding. It removes drugs and other poisons from your blood. The liver also stores energy for when you need it.

Most people with hepatitis B have an acute, self-limited course and completely recover without treatment. However, approximately 5 to 10 percent of patients who contract hepatitis B will develop a chronic infection that may lead to cirrhosis. Patients with chronic hepatitis B require treatment with medication to eradicate the infection.



What causes hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is caused by a virus.

A virus is a germ that causes sickness. (For example, the flu is caused by a virus.) People can pass viruses to each other. The virus that causes hepatitis B is called the hepatitis B virus.

How could I get hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B spreads by contact with an infected person's blood, semen, or other body fluid.

You could get hepatitis B by

- having sex with an infected person without using a condom
- sharing drug needles
- having a tattoo or body piercing done with dirty tools that were used on someone else
- getting pricked with a needle that has infected blood on it (health care workers can get hepatitis B this way)
- living with someone who has hepatitis B
- sharing a toothbrush or razor with an infected person
- traveling to countries where hepatitis B is common

An infected woman can give hepatitis B to her baby at birth or through her breast milk.

You can NOT get hepatitis B by

- shaking hands with an infected person
- hugging an infected person
- sitting next to an infected person

What are the symptoms?

Hepatitis B can make you feel like you have the flu.

You might

- feel tired
- feel sick to your stomach
- have a fever
- not want to eat
- have stomach pain
- have diarrhea

Some people have

- dark yellow urine
- light-colored stools
- yellowish eyes and skin

Some people don't have any symptoms.

If you have symptoms or think you might have hepatitis B, go to a doctor.

What are the tests for hepatitis B?

To check for hepatitis B, the doctor will test your blood.

These tests show if you have hepatitis B and how serious it is.

The doctor may also do a liver biopsy.

A biopsy (BYE-op-see) is a simple test. The doctor removes a tiny piece of your liver through a needle. The doctor checks the piece of liver for signs of hepatitis B and liver damage.

How is chronic hepatitis B treated?

Treatment for chronic hepatitis B may involve



Chronic hepatitis B is treated through shots of medicine.

- **A drug called interferon** (in-ter-FEAR-on). It is given through shots. Most people are treated for 4 months.
- **A drug called lamivudine** (la-MIV-you-deen). You take it by mouth once a day. Treatment is usually for one year.
- **A drug called adefovir dipivoxil** (uh-DEH-foh-veer dih-pih-VOX-ill). You take it by mouth once a day. Treatment is usually for one year.
- **A drug called entecavir**. You take it by mouth once a day. Treatment is usually for one year.
- **Surgery**. Over time, hepatitis B may cause your liver to stop working. If that happens, you will need a new liver. The surgery is called a liver transplant. It involves taking out the old, damaged liver and putting in a new, healthy one from a donor.

How can I protect myself?

You can get the hepatitis B vaccine.

A vaccine is a drug that you take when you are healthy that keeps you from getting sick. Vaccines teach your body to attack certain viruses, like the hepatitis B virus.

The hepatitis B vaccine is given through three shots. All babies should get the vaccine. Infants get the first shot within 12 hours after birth. They get the second shot at age 1 to 2 months and the third shot between ages 6 and 18 months.

Older children and adults can get the vaccine, too. They get three shots over 6 months. Children who have not had the vaccine should get it.

You need **all** of the shots to be protected. If you are traveling to other countries, make sure you get all the shots before you go. If you miss a shot, call your doctor or clinic right away to set up a new appointment.

You can also protect yourself and others from hepatitis B if you

- use a condom when you have sex
- don't share drug needles with anyone
- wear gloves if you have to touch anyone's blood
- don't use an infected person's toothbrush, razor, or anything else that could have blood on it
- make sure any tattooing or body piercing is done with clean tools

For More Information

You can also get information about hepatitis B from these groups:

American Liver Foundation (ALF)

75 Maiden Lane, Suite 603
New York, NY 10038-4810
Phone: 1-800-GO-LIVER (465-4837),
1-888-4HEP-USA (443-7872),
or 212-668-1000
Fax: 212-483-8179
Email: info@liverfoundation.org
Internet: www.liverfoundation.org

Hepatitis B Foundation

700 East Butler Avenue
Doylestown, PA 18901-2697
Phone: 215-489-4900
Fax: 215-489-4920
Email: info@hepb.org
Internet: www.hepb.org

Hepatitis Foundation International (HFI)

504 Blick Drive
Silver Spring, MD 20904-2901
Phone: 1-800-891-0707 or 301-622-4200
Fax: 301-622-4702
Email: hfi@comcast.net
Internet: www.hepfi.org