

Hepatitis B



What Is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is an infection of the liver caused by a virus. When the liver is infected, it does not work as well as it should. Most adults who get hepatitis B have it for a short time and then get better. Sometimes the virus causes a long-term infection. Over time, it can cause damage to the liver. Hepatitis B is spread from person to person through blood or bodily fluids.

It can be spread if you:

- Share drugs and needles
- Have sex with someone who has hepatitis B
- Are stuck by infected needles
- Share items like razors or toothbrushes with someone who has hepatitis B
- Get a tattoo or piercing with tools that were not cleaned correctly
- Are born to a mother who has hepatitis B



There is a vaccine to prevent hepatitis B infection. The vaccine is a series of 3 shots given during a 6-month period. All 3 shots are needed to prevent hepatitis B.



What Are the Warning Signs of Hepatitis B?

Many people with hepatitis B don't know they have it because they don't have symptoms. If you do have symptoms, they may include:

- Fever
- Feeling tired
- Loss of appetite
- Feeling sick and vomiting
- Grey-colored stools
- Dark urine
- Joint pain
- Yellowing of the eyes and skin (jaundice)



How Is Hepatitis B Diagnosed?

Your doctor will do a blood test to check if you have hepatitis B or had it in the past. If you are diagnosed with hepatitis B, your doctor may order a liver biopsy to see how much damage there is to your liver. For this test, a small needle takes a tiny sample of your liver for testing.



How Is Hepatitis B Treated?

- Call your doctor right away if you think that you have been exposed to hepatitis B. You should get the hepatitis B vaccine as soon as possible.
- If you have a recent infection, your doctor will pay close attention to your condition. You should rest, drink fluids, and eat a healthy diet while your body fights the infection.
- Sometimes, the infection goes away on its own without treatment. Most patients don't know they have been infected.

If the hepatitis B virus does not go away on its own, you may have chronic hepatitis B and need medicine to reduce liver damage. If your liver has been severely damaged, you may need a liver transplant.

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Questions for My Doctor

- Should I get the hepatitis B vaccine?
- How do I find out if I ever got the hepatitis B vaccine?
- How can I be infected if I do not feel sick?
- What treatment is best for me?
- What are the side effects of treatment?
- Do I have to stop drinking alcohol?
- Will I have to stop doing the things I like to do?
- Is there a cure for hepatitis B?
- What should I do to protect others from getting hepatitis B?



Bottom Line

- Hepatitis B is caused by a virus that damages the liver. It spreads from one person to another through blood and bodily fluids.
- Symptoms include fever, feeling tired, loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting, and joint pain.
- After many years, the virus can severely damage the liver.
- A blood test for the hepatitis B virus can show if you have the disease.
- Treatment may include antiviral medicine. If your liver is severely damaged, you may need a liver transplant.

For More Information

- **Medline Plus:**
www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/hepatitisb.html
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention:**
www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HBV/PDFs/HepBGeneralFactSheet-BW.pdf

Notes:
