

Hepatitis B - Factsheet

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is an inflammation of the liver caused by an enveloped DNA virus known as Hepatitis B Virus (HBV).

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis B?

Symptoms generally occur from 2 to 3 months after exposure but may last up to several months. Symptoms can include fever, fatigue, dark urine, clay-colored stool, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, joint pain, and jaundice. People with chronic HBV infection may not have any symptoms.

How is Hepatitis B spread?

The Hepatitis B Virus is not spread by casual contact. This virus is found in blood. HBV is transmitted through activities that involve contact with infectious blood or body fluids (e.g., semen). HBV is not spread through food or water, sharing eating utensils, breastfeeding, hugging, kissing, hand holding, coughing, or sneezing.

How long are people contagious?

People can spread the virus as long as it is present in their blood.

Who gets Hepatitis B?

Anyone can get hepatitis B, but those at higher risk include:

- People born to an HBV-infected mother
- People who have sexual contact with someone who has an HBV infection
- People who engage in anal sex
- People who have multiple sex partners (e.g., >1 sex partner during the previous 6 months)
- People who share needles
- People who share personal care items (e.g., razors, nail clippers, toothbrushes) with someone who has an HBV infection
- Health care and public safety workers at risk for occupational exposure to blood or blood-contaminated body fluids
- Travelers to countries with intermediate or high prevalence of HBV infection (Asia, Africa, South America, Pacific Islands, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East).

What treatment is available for people with Hepatitis B?

For acute HBV infections, no medication is available; treatment is supportive. There are several medications that can slow viral growth, improve immune responses, and limit liver damage for people with chronic HBV infection.

Do infected people need to be kept home from school, work or daycare?

No, Hepatitis B Virus is not spread by casual contact.

How can I protect myself and my family from getting Hepatitis B?

The best way to prevent hepatitis B is vaccination.

Other ways to lower your risk include:

- Avoid sharing needles, syringes, or other drug equipment
- Avoid unprotected sex
- Avoid sharing personal care items, such as razors, nail clippers, and toothbrushes
- Avoid non-professional tattooing or body piercing
- Avoid contact with blood (e.g., wear gloves when touching blood and clean up spilled blood with bleach)
- Safely handle needles and other sharp objects
- If you are infected with HBV, avoid donating blood