

Hepatitis Panel



Does this test have other names?

hepatitis screen; hepatitis A ab screen; hepatitis A antibody (HAAb), IgM antibody; hepatitis B ab screen; hepatitis B core antibody (HBcAb); IgM antibody; hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg); HBsAG; anti-HBs; HBsAB; anti-HBc; HBcAB; hepatitis B surface antibody; hepatitis B core antibody; hepatitis B e antigen; hepatitis B e antibody; hepatitis C ab screen; hepatitis C antibody

What is this test?

This is a panel of blood tests that looks to see whether you have a hepatitis virus infection. The tests may be known by different names. This depends on your provider and lab. The tests look for antibodies that your body has made against a hepatitis virus. They also look for parts of a specific virus (antigens).

Hepatitis affects the liver. Hepatitis is the general word for liver swelling (inflammation). Viral hepatitis is the term for hepatitis caused by several viruses. Common viruses include hepatitis A, B, and C. These are more likely to cause liver damage. These infect people through different routes. They cause varying degrees of liver problems.

Hepatitis A is spread by:

- Coming in contact with contaminated stool
- Sexual intercourse
- Eating food made by an infected person who didn't wash their hands after using the bathroom
- Eating contaminated food or water
- Putting an object in your mouth that came into contact with an infected person's stool

This test panel looks for the IgM antibody that your body made to fight this virus at first. Or it looks for the total antibody to see if you had hepatitis A in the past. Hepatitis A infection usually clears up without treatment after a few weeks. If your symptoms continue, you need to see your healthcare provider again.

Hepatitis B is spread by:

- Coming in contact with infected body fluids, including semen and blood
- Sexual intercourse
- Using unsterilized tattoo equipment
- Sharing contaminated hypodermic needles

Diagnosis of a current infection is based on the presence of the IgM antibody to the hepatitis B core antigen (anti-HBc) and a viral substance called hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg). This virus can cause a long-lasting infection.

Hepatitis C is spread by coming in contact with blood from an infected person. This test looks for the IgG antibody your body makes to fight the hepatitis C virus. Hepatitis C infections usually become long-lasting.

Why do I need this test?

You may need this test if your healthcare provider suspects you have hepatitis caused by a virus. Depending on the type of infection, your symptoms can include:

- Yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice)
- Fatigue
- Pale-colored stool (gray- or clay-colored)
- Dark urine
- Stomach upset
- Weight loss
- Unusual bleeding and bruising
- Fever
- Joint pain
- Belly pain
- Swelling in the belly and lower legs
- Loss of appetite
- Visible blood vessels in the skin
- Confusion in extreme cases

What other tests might I have along with this test?

Your healthcare provider may order other tests to help diagnose viral hepatitis. These may include liver function tests such as:

- Alanine aminotransferase, or ALT
- Aspartate aminotransferase, or AST
- Gamma-glutamyltransferase, or GGT
- Albumin
- Bilirubin
- Prothrombin time, or PT

Liver function tests look for enzymes in your blood that show how the liver is working. They also test your liver's ability to make certain substances and look at how well your liver filters your blood. Other tests are often done to make sure the liver is healthy and you have no other liver disease.

You may need other tests to look for viral DNA or RNA. You may also have testing for other hepatitis viruses.

What do my test results mean?

Test results may vary depending on your age, gender, health history, and other things. Your test results may be different depending on the lab used. They may not mean you have a problem. Ask your healthcare provider what your test results mean for you.

Test results for these viruses can mean you have:

Hepatitis A

Normal results are negative, meaning you don't have the IgM antibody in your blood. The antibody shows up 3 to 4 weeks after you are exposed to the virus. The antibody peaks about a month after symptoms appear. The antibody typically can't be detected 3 to 4 months after symptoms begin. The total antibody test for hepatitis A will be positive if you've ever had hepatitis A. If your test results are positive, it doesn't necessarily mean you have a current infection. It may mean you had an infection in the past or it's a false-positive.

Hepatitis B

Normal antigen results are negative. That means you don't have the HBsAg antigen in your blood. The HBsAg is usually found if you have either acute or chronic infection. It usually shows up 2 to 6 weeks after you are exposed to the virus. The antigen peaks shortly before or after symptoms begin. They typically can't be detected 1 to 3 months after it peaks. Normal hepatitis B core antibody results are negative. A positive hepatitis B core antibody test may mean you have a current or past hepatitis B infection. A positive hepatitis B surface antibody test means you are protected against the hepatitis B virus. This could be from getting the hepatitis B vaccine or from a past hepatitis B infection. If you have hepatitis B, your provider will check the antibody and antigen test results. The purpose of these tests is to better understand your hepatitis B infection to plan your treatment.

Hepatitis C

Normal results are negative. This means you don't have the IgG antibody in your blood. The antibody may peak 6 to 12 months after you are exposed to the virus.

How is this test done?

The test is done with a blood sample. A needle is used to draw blood from a vein in your arm or hand.

Does this test pose any risks?

Having a blood test with a needle carries some risks. These include bleeding, infection, bruising, and feeling lightheaded. When the needle pricks your arm or hand, you may feel a slight sting or pain. Afterward, the site may be sore.

What might affect my test results?

A past infection with hepatitis A can give a false-positive result. This means it shows you have a current infection even though you don't.

How do I get ready for this test?

You don't need to prepare for this test. But talk with your healthcare provider about your risk factors for hepatitis infection. Be sure your healthcare provider knows about all medicines, herbs, vitamins, and supplements you are taking. This includes medicines that don't need a prescription and any illegal drugs you may use.

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