

Hepatitis B

FACTSHEET

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What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B (formerly known as serum hepatitis) is a liver disease caused by a virus.

Who gets Hepatitis B?

Anyone can get Hepatitis B, but those at greater risk include:

- ◆ Those who have unprotected sex or have multiple sexual partners;
- ◆ Drug abusers who share needles;
- ◆ Certain health care workers who have contact with infected blood;
- ◆ Homosexual males;
- ◆ People in custodial care (in settings such as for developmentally disabled);
- ◆ Hemodialysis patients;
- ◆ Household or sexual contacts of an infected person.

How is the virus spread?

Hepatitis B can be found in the blood and, to a lesser extent, saliva, semen and other body fluids of an infected person. It is spread by direct contact with infected body fluids; usually by needle stick injury or sexual contact. Hepatitis B virus is not spread by casual contact.

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis B?

The symptoms of Hepatitis B may include fatigue, poor appetite, nausea, vomiting abdominal pain, fever, jaundice (yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes or dark urine), joint pain. About 30% of people infected with Hepatitis B have no symptoms

How soon do symptoms appear?

The symptoms may appear two to six months after exposure, but usually within three months.

How long is a person able to spread the virus?

The virus can be found in blood and other body fluids several weeks before symptoms and during the symptom stage. Approximately 10 percent of infected people may become long-term carriers of the virus. Long-term carriers can carry the virus for many months.

What is the treatment for Hepatitis B?

There are no special medicines or antibiotics that can be used to treat a person, once the symptoms appear. Generally, bed rest is all that is needed.

What precautions should Hepatitis B carriers take?

Hepatitis B carriers should follow standard hygienic practices to ensure that his or her blood or other body fluids do not directly contaminate close contacts. Carriers must not share razors, toothbrushes or any other object that may become contaminated with blood. In addition, susceptible household members, particularly sexual partners, should be immunized with hepatitis B vaccine. Make sure your sexual partners contact a physician or the DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH within 14 days of having sex with you to find out about getting a shot of Hepatitis B Immune Globulin (HBIG). This will prevent their getting Hepatitis B. It is important for carriers to inform their dentist and health care providers.

How can Hepatitis B be prevented?

A vaccine to prevent Hepatitis B has been available for several years. It is safe, effective and is recommended for people in high-risk settings who have not already been infected. A special Hepatitis B immune globulin is also available for people who are exposed to the virus. In the event of exposure to Hepatitis B, consult a doctor or the D.C. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH.

Vaccine routine for infants required for daycare and school age children (varies by state).

