



# Hepatitis **B**

**Hepatitis** is a disease in which the liver becomes irritated or damaged. There are many causes of hepatitis, including viruses such as the hepatitis B virus (formerly called serum hepatitis).

**Hepatitis B** is a serious form of viral hepatitis that can cause lifelong health problems (chronic illness) and even death. The virus is usually spread from one person to another through blood or other body fluids. The symptoms of hepatitis B develop slowly, usually from 6 weeks to several months after catching the virus. Hepatitis B is diagnosed through a blood test.

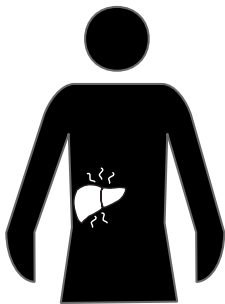
**Even if people seem to recover from this illness, they can become hepatitis B carriers.** This means they have hepatitis B virus in their blood and other body fluids, usually for the rest of their lives. Although they may not look or feel sick, they can infect other people. They can also develop severe liver problems at a later date.

**Hepatitis B** is similar to hepatitis C because these forms of hepatitis are usually spread by contaminated blood or by sexual activity. Hepatitis B is different from hepatitis A, which is spread from feces to mouth and is usually not such a severe illness.

## Usual symptoms of hepatitis B

At first, people with Hepatitis B may have no symptoms, or very mild symptoms. Or they may feel as if they have the flu. Someone with hepatitis B can have **some, all, or none** of the following symptoms:

- tiredness and weakness
- loss of appetite
- abdominal pain, especially around the liver (see picture)
- nausea and vomiting
- fever, chills
- muscle/joint aches
- dark urine
- yellow color (jaundice) of the skin or white part of the eyes
- diarrhea or light-colored bowel movements



## How hepatitis B is spread

Hepatitis B is spread by **direct contact** with infected body fluids, such as blood, saliva, or secretions from the vagina, penis or rectum. It can also be spread by infected fluids from open wounds.

**You cannot catch hepatitis B by sneezing, coughing, hugging, eating food prepared by a carrier, or other casual contact.**

**You can get hepatitis B from:**

- having sex with an infected partner
- sharing needles or syringes
- sharing tattoo and acupuncture needles, if not properly sterilized
- passing the infection to newborn babies from an infected mother during birth
- a job exposure to human blood
- a blood transfusion before July 1992

Common ways to catch viral hepatitis			
Hepatitis	A	B	C
Contaminated food/water	■		
Feces to hands/mouth	■		
Family members	■	■	S
Mother to infant		■	S
SEX - vaginal		■	S
SEX - oral/anal	■	■	
NEEDLES - drug use with shared needles	R	■	■
NEEDLES - medical use, accidental		■	■
NEEDLES - body piercing or tattoo		■	■
Blood products	R	■	■

■ Confirmed transmission  
 S Suspected but not proven  
 R Rarely

## Treatment of hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is now being treated with new drugs. One of these is *Interferon*. Your doctor will do tests to decide if you should take this medication. Many new drugs are being tested to treat chronic hepatitis B.

## Ways to avoid hepatitis B

### **Vaccinate!**

A vaccine is available to prevent hepatitis B. It is given in a series of three shots. People at risk should get the vaccine. They are:

- people whose work exposes them to blood or other body fluids, such as health-care and public safety workers
- people who have sex with a partner who is a hepatitis B carrier
- people who have multiple sex partners, or have had sexually transmitted diseases
- people who inject drugs (shoot up)
- people who have hepatitis C



Current recommendations state that the hepatitis B vaccine should be given to all children under the age of 18 years, and to adults over 18 years who are at risk for hepatitis B infection, as listed above.

Babies are often vaccinated during the first year of life.

California law now states that all students entering 7th grade must be vaccinated against hepatitis B.




### **Sterilize!**

Needles and other instruments that penetrate the skin should be sterile. This includes needles used for tattoos, acupuncture and drugs. Dispose of all needles properly.



### **Avoid risky behavior!**

If you have casual sex or inject drugs, you are taking a risk with your health.

	<b>To lower your risk, do the following:</b>		
Use a condom during sex, every time.		Don't share needles if you inject drugs.	If you do share needles, clean them with bleach every time you use a needle.

**Your doctor needs to report hepatitis to  
County Health Services to prevent  
this disease from spreading throughout the community.**

**For more information or to report this illness,  
call (619) 515-6620.**

