



Hepatitis B Facts

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B (HBV) is a liver disease that is caused by a virus.

How do you get hepatitis B?

HBV is spread by contact with infected body fluids (blood, semen and vaginal fluids).

HBV is usually spread through:

- Anal, vaginal or oral sex.
- Sharing needles to inject any kind of drugs.
- Sharing needles for tattooing and/or piercing.
- Sharing personal care items (razors, toothbrushes).
- Mother to baby during birth.
- Infected blood or blood products.

How can you tell if you have HBV?

It may take six weeks to six months for symptoms to appear. Symptoms of hepatitis B can vary from one person to another and include:

- Tiredness.
- Fever.
- Loss of appetite.
- Yellow eyes and skin (jaundice).
- Flu-like aches and chills.
- Dark urine.
- Nausea and stomach aches.
- Light-colored bowel movements.

Many people who are infected never have symptoms. You can't tell for sure if a person is infected by their appearance.

How long can an infected person spread the virus?

Anyone with HBV can spread it to others:

- Before symptoms appear.
- For an unknown time after symptoms go away.
- Even if symptoms are not present.

In most cases HBV is acute, meaning it only affects a person for a short time. However, some infected people can suffer from a chronic infection (infected for a lifetime) and:

- Can infect others.
- May have no symptoms, or just feel tired and weak.
- May have severe liver problems, especially liver cancer.

How is hepatitis B treated?

Most people recover completely from acute HBV with proper care, rest and diet. Individuals with chronic HBV should be monitored by a provider for signs of liver disease. Some individuals with chronic disease may be prescribed treatment to limit the effect of HBV on the liver.

Can you protect yourself from hepatitis HBV?

Yes. The best ways to avoid HBV are to:

- Never share needles to inject illegal drugs, inject medications (such as insulin), have a tattoo made or pierce a body part.
- Never share personal care items such as toothbrushes, razors and manicure items.
- Not have sex (abstinence).
- Limit your number of sex partners.
- Use a latex condom correctly every time you have vaginal, anal or oral sex.
- Talk to your sex partners about HBV and other STIs.
- Get vaccinated. The HBV vaccine available is safe and effective for everyone, including pregnant women and children. The vaccine is usually given as three shots over a six month period.

If you have HBV:

- Do not donate blood, plasma, sperm (semen), organs or other body tissue.
- Cover cuts, sores and any other breaks in your skin.

Who can I call for more information?

National STD Hotline: 1-800-227-8922

www.ashastd.org

Guilford County Department of Public Health

Greensboro or High Point: 336-641-7777

www.myguilford.com

