

Hepatitis B

Frequently Asked Questions



What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B virus (HBV) is an infection of the liver caused when someone is exposed to infected bodily fluids including blood, semen, or vaginal fluid. A vaccine is available to prevent hepatitis B. Infection can be acute (short-term) or can develop into a chronic (long-term) infection. Between 5-10% of HBV infected individuals over age 5 may develop chronic HBV. Infected infants and children under age 5 are much more likely to develop chronic HBV, which is why vaccinations and prevention of mother-to-child transmission is important.

What are the symptoms?

The symptoms of hepatitis B can include:

- Fatigue
- Poor appetite
- Fever
- Vomiting
- Diarrhea
- Joint pain
- Hives or rash
- Urine may become darker in color
- Jaundice (yellowing of skin and whites of the eyes)

How does it spread?

Hepatitis B is found in blood, semen and vaginal fluids. It can spread through direct contact with any of the above body fluids, close sexual contact with infected body fluids, or exposure to infected blood.

Who is at risk for hepatitis B?

While only 9 cases of acute HBV were reported in 2009, over **1,700 chronic HBV** case reports were received by PDPH in 2009. Behaviors and situations that put people at risk for HBV include:

- Unprotected sexual contact (vaginal, oral, or anal sex) with an infected person
- Births when the baby is born to a mother who is a hepatitis B carrier
- Sharing needles and other equipment when using drugs
- Contact with infected blood in a health care setting
- Getting a tattoo or body piercing at an unlicensed facility or “tattoo party”
- Sharing personal hygiene items like razors or toothbrushes with a household member who has HBV

How is it diagnosed and treated?

Hepatitis B is diagnosed by blood tests. Rest, healthy eating, and drinking fluids can provide relief for people with acute HBV; medication is available to treat chronic HBV. Patients with either acute or chronic HBV should have their disease monitored regularly by a clinician.

What should I do if I think I have it?

If you think you have hepatitis B, you should contact your medical provider and discuss your symptoms. You should also follow standard hygienic practices to ensure that close contacts are not affected.

How can I prevent hepatitis B?

- Get vaccinated—this is the best way to prevent HBV
- Know your status—if you have any risk factors, let your medical provider know you want to be tested
- Practice safe sex—use a condom
- Avoid sharing drug equipment—Prevention Point Philadelphia offers free syringes and other services for drug users

Where can I find out more information about hepatitis B?

- Visit the CDC website: <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/B/index.htm>



For more information contact your doctor, refer to <http://www.phila.gov/Health/> or contact the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, Division of Disease Control at 215-685-6740.