

HEPATITIS B and Sexual Health



Can Hepatitis B be spread through sex?

Yes. Hepatitis B is 50–100 times more infectious than HIV and easily transmitted through sexual activity. In fact, sexual contact is the most common way Hepatitis B is spread in the United States.

If you are sexually active, talk to your health professional about your risk for STDs and HIV and get vaccinated against Hepatitis B.

What is hepatitis?

“Hepatitis” means inflammation of the liver. The liver is a vital organ that processes nutrients, filters the blood, and fights infections. When the liver is inflamed or damaged, its function can be affected.

Hepatitis is most often caused by a virus. In the United States, the most common types of viral hepatitis are Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C. Heavy alcohol use, toxins, some medications, and certain medical conditions can also cause hepatitis.

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a contagious liver disease that results from infection with the Hepatitis B virus. When first infected, a person can develop an “acute” infection, which can range in severity from a very mild illness with few or no symptoms to a serious condition requiring hospitalization. **Acute** Hepatitis B refers to the first 6 months after someone is exposed to the Hepatitis B virus. Some people are able to fight the infection and clear the virus. For others, the infection remains and leads to a “chronic,” or lifelong, illness. **Chronic** Hepatitis B refers to the illness that occurs when the Hepatitis B virus remains in a person’s body. Over time, the infection can cause serious health problems.

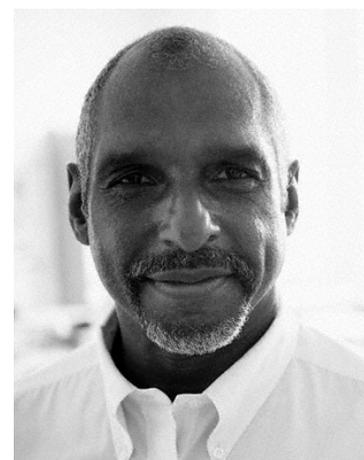
The best way to prevent Hepatitis B is to get vaccinated.

How serious is Hepatitis B?

Over time, approximately 15%–25% of people with chronic Hepatitis B develop serious liver problems, including liver damage, cirrhosis, liver failure, and even liver cancer. Every year, approximately 3,000 people in the United States and more than 600,000 people worldwide die from Hepatitis B-related liver disease.

How common is Hepatitis B?

In the United States, an estimated 40,000 new infections occur each year. About 1.2 million people are living with chronic Hepatitis B, and many do not know they are infected.



How is Hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B is usually spread when blood, semen, or other body fluids from a person infected with the Hepatitis B virus enter the body of someone who is not infected. This can happen through sexual contact with an infected person; sharing needles, syringes, or other injection drug equipment; or from an infected mother to her baby at birth.



Who should be vaccinated against Hepatitis B?

The vaccine is safe and effective and recommended for sexually active adults, especially:

- People with multiple sex partners
- Anyone with a sexually transmitted disease
- Men who have sexual encounters with other men
- Anyone having sex with an infected partner

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis B?

Many people with Hepatitis B do not have symptoms and do not know they are infected. Even though a person has no symptoms, the virus can still be detected in the blood.

If symptoms occur with acute infection, they usually appear within 3 months of exposure and can last anywhere from 2–12 weeks. Symptoms of chronic Hepatitis B can take up to 30 years to develop. Damage to the liver can silently occur during this time. When symptoms do appear, they often are a sign of advanced liver disease. Symptoms for both acute and chronic Hepatitis B can include:

- Fever
- Vomiting
- Dark urine
- Fatigue
- Abdominal pain
- Joint pain
- Loss of appetite
- Grey-colored stools
- Jaundice
- Nausea

How is Hepatitis B diagnosed and treated?

Hepatitis B is diagnosed with specific blood tests that are not part of blood work typically done during regular physical exams. For acute Hepatitis B, doctors usually recommend rest, adequate nutrition, fluids, and close medical monitoring. Some people may need to be hospitalized. Those living with chronic Hepatitis B are evaluated for liver problems and monitored on a regular basis. Even though a person may not have symptoms or feel sick, damage to the liver can still occur. Several new treatments are available that can significantly improve health and delay or reverse the effects of liver disease.

Can Hepatitis B be prevented with a vaccine?

Yes. The best way to prevent Hepatitis B is by getting vaccinated. For adults, the vaccine is usually given as a series of 3 shots over a period of 6 months. The entire series of shots is needed for long-term protection. Booster doses are not currently recommended.

There is also a combination vaccine that protects against both Hepatitis A and Hepatitis B. People should talk to their health professional about which vaccine is best for them.

For more information

Talk to your health professional, call your health department, or visit www.cdc.gov/hepatitis.



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Division of Viral Hepatitis



www.cdc.gov/hepatitis