

Hepatitis B (HBV)

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is an infection of the liver caused by the hepatitis B virus. While most adults with hepatitis B will recover fully from the infection, some people will go on to become chronic carriers of the virus, especially if infected at an early age. Chronic infection may cause permanent damage to the liver including chronic liver disease and liver cancer.

How is Hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B is spread through contact with blood and other body fluids such as semen, vaginal secretions or saliva from an infected person.

Situations that put you at higher risk of getting hepatitis B are:

- Having unprotected sex with an infected person
- Sharing needles, syringes or other drug equipment such as cookers, cotton, water, crack pipes and straws for snorting
- Tattooing, body piercing or acupuncture with non-sterile equipment
- Sharing personal items such as razors, nail clippers or toothbrushes with an infected person
- Needle-stick injuries
- Being born to a mother with hepatitis B
- Living in the same household with someone who has hepatitis B
- Travelling to or living in parts of the world where hepatitis B is more common.

Hepatitis B is **NOT spread by** casual contact such as hugging, shaking hands or being around someone who is sneezing or coughing.

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis B?

Some people may have no symptoms at all, while others may have:

- Flu-like symptoms (fever, nausea, vomiting)
- Fatigue (tiredness, weakness)
- Abdominal pain
- Loss of appetite
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin or the whites of the eyes)
- Dark urine.

How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms usually appear within 60 to 90 days after contact with hepatitis B, but the range can be from 45 to 180 days.

How is Hepatitis B diagnosed?

Hepatitis B can be diagnosed through a blood test. The blood test can be ordered by your health care provider.

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How can the spread of Hepatitis B be prevented?

- Get immunized with the hepatitis B vaccine. The vaccine is given in 2 or 3 doses over 6 months. Grade 7 students can get the hepatitis B vaccine for free through the Thunder Bay District Health Unit
- Adopt safer sex practices. Use condoms for oral, vaginal and anal sex
- Never share needles, syringes or other drug equipment
- Get a tattoo or piercing from a business that is inspected by the Health Unit. You can ask to see their inspection report
- Do not share personal items such as razors, nail clippers or toothbrushes
- Follow up with routine prenatal care for each pregnancy so that newborns can receive appropriate care if required.

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a health care professional about any health concerns.

**For further information contact the Infectious Disease Program at 625-8318
or toll free 1-888-294-6630, ext. 8318.**