
Hepatitis B

This fact sheet provides basic information only. It must not take the place of medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always talk to a healthcare professional about any health concerns you have, and before you make any changes to your diet, lifestyle or treatment.

What is it ?

Hepatitis B is a serious infection of the liver. It is common and caused by a virus. Symptoms may be tiredness, loss of appetite, stomach discomfort and yellow skin. The virus is found in blood, semen, vaginal fluids and saliva. Hepatitis B is the only sexually transmitted disease that has a safe and effective vaccine to protect against infection.

How did I get it ?

There are several ways of getting hepatitis B. One way is by sexual contact with an infected person.

There is a greater chance of getting the infection through anal sex. Another way is by sharing personal items (toothbrushes, razors, etc.) with an infected person. Another way is through contact with infected blood in dirty needles used for injecting drugs.

What can it do to me ?

Most people get better and can no longer pass on the virus. A small number die (less than 1%). Others will always carry the virus and continue to be infectious (able to pass it on to others). They are called "carriers." Some carriers will go on to have chronic liver disease. Some will develop cancer of the liver.

How is it treated ?

There is no specific treatment for hepatitis B. Do not drink alcohol if you have hepatitis. A special diet may be needed if you have severe disease. Your doctor will advise you.

Could I give it to other people ?

Yes. As long as you carry the virus, you can infect others. You may pass it on to your sex partner(s), to those who live in close contact with you, and to those who share your needles for injecting drugs. All of these contacts should be examined by a doctor. If they are not yet infected, they should be vaccinated.

Pregnant women who are carriers may pass hepatitis B on to their babies around the time of birth. Most infected infants become carriers. A pregnant woman should have a test for hepatitis B at her first visit to a doctor. If she is a carrier, the infant can be vaccinated at birth to protect against infection.

When can I have sex again ?

When you can no longer pass the infection on to others. If you are infectious (a carrier), do not have unprotected sex until your partner is vaccinated.

Is follow-up important ?

Yes. It is important to be checked to see if you are still infectious (a carrier). If you are a hepatitis B carrier, you should see your doctor at regular intervals.

Remember :

- Return for check-up visits as your doctor or clinic asks;
- Tell people you have had sex with during the past 6 months. They should be examined, and vaccinated if necessary;
- Use condoms to lower the chance of infections in future;
- If you are carrying the virus, never donate blood, semen or body organs.

If you are still worried or have more questions, call your local health unit or STD clinic.

Government of Ontario

For information about health services and resources :

www.health.gov.on.ca

For consumer-friendly health tips and information :

www.HealthyOntario.com

INFOline: 1-877-234-4343;

TTY: 1-800-387-5559

Telehealth Ontario:

1-866-797-0000; TTY 1-866-797-0007

INFOline is open during business hours and can provide general information on healthcare.

Telehealth Ontario is a 24/7 service which uses nurse practitioners to answer your immediate health concerns.