

Hepatitis B

Fact Sheet



Maine Center for Disease
Control and Prevention

An Office of the
Department of Health and Human Services

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What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is caused by a virus that attacks the liver. The virus, which is called hepatitis B virus (HBV), can cause lifelong infection, cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, liver cancer, liver failure, and death.

How do you know if you have hepatitis B?

Only a blood test can tell for sure.

How is HBV spread?

HBV is spread when blood from an infected person enters the body of a person who is not infected. For example, HBV is spread through:

- Having sex with an infected person without using a condom (the efficacy of latex condoms in preventing infection with HBV is unknown, but their proper use might reduce transmission)
- Sharing drugs, needles, or "works" when "shooting" drugs
- Through needlesticks or sharps exposures on the job
- From an infected mother to her baby during birth.

Hepatitis B is not spread through food or water, sharing eating utensils, breastfeeding, hugging, kissing, coughing, sneezing or by casual contact.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis B?

Sometimes a person with HBV infection has no symptoms at all. The older you are, the more likely you are to have symptoms. You might be infected with HBV (and be spreading the virus) and not know it.

If you have symptoms, they might include:

- yellow skin or yellowing of the whites of your eyes (jaundice)
- tiredness
- loss of appetite
- nausea
- abdominal discomfort
- dark urine
- clay-colored bowel movements
- joint pain

How long does it take for symptoms to occur after exposure to hepatitis B virus?

If symptoms occur, they occur on the average of 12 weeks (range 9-21 weeks) after exposure to hepatitis B virus. Symptoms occur in about 70% of patients. Symptoms are more likely to occur in adults than in children.

What are the risk factors for hepatitis B?

You are at increased risk of HBV infection if you:

- have sex with someone infected with HBV
- have sex with more than one partner
- shoot drugs
- are a man and have sex with a man
- live in the same house with someone who has chronic (long-term) HBV infection
- have a job that involves contact with human blood
- are a client in a home for the developmentally disabled
- have hemophilia
- were born in, or travel to areas where hepatitis B is common

One out of 20 people in the United States will get infected with HBV some time during their lives. Your risk is higher if your parents were born in Southeast Asia, Africa, the Amazon Basin in South America, the Pacific Islands, or the Middle East.

Is there a cure for hepatitis B?

There are no approved medications available for recently acquired (acute) HBV infection. Hepatitis B vaccine is available for the prevention of HBV infection. There are antiviral drugs available for the treatment of chronic HBV infection.

What does the term "chronic hepatitis B" mean?

Chronic hepatitis B means that you have a long-term HBV infection; your body did not get rid of the virus when you were first infected with HBV. The risk of progressing to chronic infection depends on age (i.e., 2% to 6% of people over 5 years of age; 30% of children 1-5 years of age; and up to 90% of infants). People with chronic infection can infect others and are at increased

risk of serious liver disease including cirrhosis and liver cancer. In the United States, an estimated 1.25 million people are chronically infected with HBV.

How is chronic Hepatitis B treated?

There are at least six drugs used for the treatment of people with chronic hepatitis B.

How common is HBV infection in the U.S.?

In 2003, an estimated 73,000 people were infected with HBV. People of all ages get hepatitis B and about 5,000 die per year of sickness caused by HBV.

If you are pregnant, should you worry about hepatitis B?

Yes, you should get a blood test to check for HBV infection early in your pregnancy. This test is called hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg). If you test negative early in pregnancy, but continue behaviors that put you at risk for HBV infection (e.g., multiple sex partners, injection drug use), you should be retested for HBsAg close to delivery. If your HBsAg test is positive, this means you are infected with HBV and can give the virus to your baby. Babies who get HBV at birth might develop chronic HBV infection that can lead to cirrhosis of the liver or liver cancer.

If your blood test is positive, your baby should receive the first dose of hepatitis B vaccine, along with another shot, hepatitis B immune globulin (called HBIG), at birth. The second dose of vaccine should be given at 1-2 months of age and the third dose at 6 months of age. Your baby may then be tested for response to the vaccine.

Can I donate blood if I have had any type of viral hepatitis?

If you had any type of viral hepatitis since the age of 11 years, you are not eligible to donate blood. In addition, if you ever tested positive for hepatitis B or hepatitis C, at any age, you are not eligible to donate, even if you were never sick or jaundiced from the infection.

How long can HBV survive outside the body?

HBV can survive outside the body at least 7 days and still be capable of causing infection.

What do you use to remove HBV from environmental surfaces?

You should clean up any blood spills - including dried blood, which can still be infectious – using a cleaning solution of one part household bleach to 10 parts water. Use gloves when cleaning up any blood spills.

Hepatitis B in Maine

The Maine CDC's primary strategy for preventing the spread of HBV in Maine is through routine vaccination of infants. Other control efforts include patient and provider education, improving disease surveillance, and preventing hepatitis B infections in newborns through the perinatal hepatitis B project. For specific information on the number of Hepatitis B infections reported in Maine, please visit the Maine CDC website: <http://www.maine.gov/dhhs/boh/newpubs.htm> and refer to the Infectious Disease Epidemiology Program Documents.

Where can I get more information?

For more information contact your healthcare provider or local health center. You can also contact the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention by calling 1-800-821-5821 or 1-800-867-4775 (Maine Immunization Program) or visiting the website:

<http://www.mainepublichealth.gov>.

The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website - <http://www.cdc.gov> – is another excellent source of health information.