

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a serious disease 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.

Who is at risk?

Hepatitis B can affect anyone. Each year in the United States, more than 200,000 people of all ages get hepatitis B and close to 5,000 die of sickness caused by HBV. If you have had other forms of hepatitis, you can still get hepatitis B.

Get vaccinated!

Hepatitis B is preventable.

How great is your risk for hepatitis B?

One out of 20 people in the United States will get hepatitis B some time during their lives. Your risk is higher if you:

- have sex with someone infected with HBV
- have sex with more than one partner
- are a man and have sex with a man
- live in the same house with someone who has lifelong HBV infection
- have a job that involves contact with human blood
- shoot drugs
- are a patient or work in a home for the developmentally disabled
- have hemophilia
- travel to areas where hepatitis B is common

Your risk is also higher if your parents were born in Southeast Asia, Africa, the Amazon Basin in South America, the Pacific Islands, and the Middle East.

If you are at risk for HBV infection, ask your health care provider about hepatitis B vaccine.

How do you get hepatitis B?

You get hepatitis B by direct contact with the blood or body fluids of an infected person; for example, you can become infected by having sex or sharing needles with an infected person. A baby can get hepatitis B from an infected mother during childbirth.

Hepatitis B is not spread through food or water or by casual contact.

Who is a carrier of hepatitis B virus?

Sometimes, people who are infected with HBV never recover fully from the infection; they carry the virus and can infect others for the rest of their lives. In the United States, about one million people carry HBV.

How do you know if you have hepatitis B?

You may have hepatitis B (and be spreading the disease) and not know it; sometimes a person with HBV infection has no symptoms at all.

If you have symptoms:

- your eyes or skin may turn yellow
- you may lose your appetite

- you may have nausea, vomiting, fever, and/or stomach or joint pain
- you may feel extremely tired and not be able to work for weeks or months

Is there a cure for hepatitis B?

There is no cure for hepatitis B; this is why prevention is so important. Hepatitis B vaccine is the best protection against HBV. Three doses are needed for complete protection.

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

If you have HBV in your blood, you can give hepatitis B to your baby. Babies who get HBV at birth might have the virus for the rest of their lives, can spread the disease, and can get cirrhosis of the liver or liver cancer.

All pregnant women should be tested for HBV early in their pregnancy. If the blood test is positive, the baby should receive vaccine along with another shot, hepatitis B immune globulin (called H-BIG), at birth. The vaccine series should be completed during the first 6 months of life.

Who should get vaccinated?

- All babies, at birth
- All children 11-12 years of age who have not been vaccinated
- Persons of any age whose behavior puts them at high risk for HBV infection
- Persons whose jobs expose them to human blood

adapted from the CDC web site; 9/2/99

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis/b/faqb.htm>