



1. What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a serious liver disease caused by the hepatitis B virus (germ). The virus enters the blood stream, attacks the liver, causes illness and may even cause death. Hepatitis B can cause either short-term (acute) or long-term (chronic) infection. Short-term infection can, but does not always, lead to long-term infection. The younger a person is when first infected with the virus, the greater his or her chance of developing long-term hepatitis B.

2. How do you get hepatitis B?

You **can** get hepatitis B by:

- Having sex with an infected person without using a condom
- Sharing needles (used for injecting drugs) with an infected person
- Getting a tattoo or piercing with tools that were not cleaned well
- Sharing personal items like razors or toothbrushes with an infected person
- Hepatitis B can also be passed from an infected mother to her baby at birth

You **can't** get hepatitis B by:

- Casual contact, such as hugging, kissing or shaking hands
- Coming into contact with the sweat or tears of someone with the virus
- Sharing a swimming pool, telephone or toilet seat with someone who has the virus

3. How do you know if you have hepatitis B?

The most common symptoms of hepatitis B are:

- Diarrhea
- Stomach pain
- Dark color urine
- Yellowing of the skin
- Weakness and fatigue
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Loss of appetite
- Joint pain

Most people with hepatitis B do not feel sick, but some may get very ill. Symptoms usually appear twelve weeks after being infected. A person with no symptoms can still give the illness to others. A blood test can tell your doctor if you have the virus.

4. How is hepatitis B treated?

Treatment depends on the type of hepatitis B. There is no medication available for acute (short-term) hepatitis B. Once a person has recovered from acute hepatitis B, they are protected from future hepatitis B infections.

If you have chronic (long-term) hepatitis B, it is very important to see your doctor often. Medications may be available. Among patients with chronic hepatitis B who receive treatment, few are cured but most show improvement.

People with acute *or* chronic hepatitis B should avoid alcohol to prevent further liver damage. During the time you have hepatitis B, it is important to eat healthy and drink plenty of fluids.

5. How can hepatitis B be prevented?

- Hepatitis A shots (vaccinations) are the best way to prevent getting it. To find out where to get free shots for adults and children, call 1-800-427-8700.
- Use a condom or latex barrier when you have sex.
- Do not share personal items such as needles (syringes), razors, toothbrushes, or any item that may have even small amounts of blood on it.
- Make sure body piercing or tattoo equipment is sterilized (germ-free).
- Wear gloves if you have to touch anyone else's blood.
- Do not donate blood, organs or sperm if you've *ever* tested positive for hepatitis B.

Sources

1. *Hepatitis B*. L.A. County Department of Public Health www.lapublichealth.org/acd/Diseases/.
2. *Hepatitis B*. CA Department of Public Health www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/
3. *Hepatitis B*. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HepatitisB.
4. *Hepatitis B*. MayoClinic. www.mayoclinic.com/health/hepatitis-b

For additional resources, please visit the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health website <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov> .