



# Questions and Answers About HEPATITIS B



## 1. What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a serious liver disease caused by a virus (germ). The virus enters the blood stream, attacks the liver, causes illness and may even cause death. People can have acute (short-term) infection and be ill within the first 6 months of getting the virus. Sometimes acute infection can lead to chronic (long-term) infection where the virus can stay in the body for a lifetime and can cause ongoing liver damage, including liver cancer. The younger a person is when infected with the virus, the greater his or her chance of developing chronic hepatitis B.

## 2. How do you get hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B can be spread by coming in to contact with an infected person's blood. For example:

- Being infected at birth (mother to baby)
- Having sex with an infected person
- Sharing toothbrushes and razors with an infected person
- Sharing needles for drug use, body piercing or tattooing
- Getting stuck with a needle that has infected blood on it (Hospital workers can get hepatitis B this way.)

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

Some infected people never feel sick. People with hepatitis B can have some or all of the following symptoms:

- Stomach pain
- Loss of appetite
- Feeling sick to your stomach (nausea)
- Feeling like throwing up (vomiting)
- Diarrhea
- Fever
- Feeling tired
- Yellowing of the skin
- Yellowing of the white part of the eyes (jaundice)
- Change in the color of urine or stool

A person with no symptoms can still give the illness so others. A blood test is taken to find out if a person has acute or chronic hepatitis B. A blood test can also find out if a person is protected from hepatitis B.

#### 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. During this time, it is important to eat healthy and drink plenty of fluids. 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. People with hepatitis B should avoid alcohol to prevent further liver damage. Among patients with chronic hepatitis B who receive treatment, few are cured but most show improvement.

#### 5. What can be done to prevent the spread of hepatitis B?

- Hepatitis B shots (vaccinations) are the best way to prevent getting it.
  - All children and high risk adults should receive the hepatitis B shots
- Use a condom or latex barrier when you have sex.
- Don't share personal items such as needles (syringes), razors, toothbrushes, earrings 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's blood.
- Do not donate blood, organs or sperm if you ever tested positive for hepatitis B.

#### 6. Where can you get hepatitis B shots?

Adults should ask their health care providers about the vaccine. To find out where to get free shots, for adults and children, please call: **1-800-427-8700**.

##### *Source(s):*

1. *Hepatitis B*. L.A. Department of Public Health. [www.lapublichealth.org/acd/Diseases/HepB.htm](http://www.lapublichealth.org/acd/Diseases/HepB.htm)
2. *Hepatitis B*. Department of Health Care Services. [www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/HepatitisB.aspx](http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/HepatitisB.aspx)
3. *Hepatitis B*. Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC). [www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HepatitisB.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/HepatitisB.htm)

For additional resources, please dial 2-1-1 or visit the L.A. County Department of Public Health website <http://publichealth.lacounty.gov>.