



Hepatitis B

What is hepatitis B? (hep-a-tite-is)

Hepatitis B or 'hep B' is a blood borne virus – a virus you can get if the blood from someone who has hepatitis B gets into your blood.

There are two types of hepatitis B.

Acute hepatitis B:

- The acute period of hepatitis B lasts up to six months.
- Most adults who get hepatitis B recover or 'clear' the virus after the acute period without treatment.
- People who clear the virus are no longer infectious – i.e. they will no longer pass hepatitis B on to other people.

Chronic hepatitis B:

- People who do not clear the hepatitis B virus after the acute phase have hepatitis B for life. This is called chronic hepatitis B.
- Unlike adults, babies and children who get hepatitis B generally cannot clear the virus. This means that most adults who have chronic hepatitis B got it at birth or in childhood.
- Chronic or life-long hepatitis B slowly damages the liver. It can cause liver failure or cancer of the liver.

The hepatitis B vaccine

There is a vaccine (injection) to prevent hepatitis B. The vaccine has been given to babies as part of a national vaccination program since 1988.

The hepatitis B vaccine can be given to adults who missed out on getting vaccinated as a baby.

If you don't know whether you've been vaccinated you can check by getting a test at the clinic. If you missed out on the vaccination and you don't have hepatitis B, you can get vaccinated.



How do you get hepatitis B?

Mother-to-baby transmission

- If a pregnant woman has chronic hepatitis B it is very likely that she will pass on hepatitis B to her baby unless the baby is given hepatitis B treatment and vaccination soon after birth.
- It is important for pregnant women to get tested for hepatitis B so that the hospital knows the new-born baby should be treated for hepatitis B. This treatment, combined with vaccination, minimises the risk of the baby getting hepatitis B.

Sexual transmission

- You can get hepatitis B from having vaginal or anal sex with someone who has it and you have not been vaccinated. Condoms protect against getting hepatitis B from sex.

Sharing drug injecting or tattoo equipment

- You can get hepatitis B from sharing drug injecting equipment or tattoo equipment with someone who has hepatitis B and you have not been vaccinated.
- Do not share injecting or tattooing equipment. Equipment might look clean but there could be a tiny amount of blood you can't see.
- You can get clean needles and syringes in chemists, health clinics, and community centres.
- It's best to get tattoos done in a tattoo shop because you can make sure they use clean equipment.

Other ways you can get hepatitis B

- Babies, children and adults can get hepatitis B if blood from a person who has hepatitis B gets directly into an open cut or sore. Cover cuts and sores with band-aids, especially during sport and play. Clean up blood spills. Throw out used tampons and pads in a tied up plastic bag.



- You can get hepatitis B from sharing personal items like toothbrushes, razors, or sex toys with someone who has hepatitis B – because there can be small amounts of blood on them. Don't share these things.

Can you get hepatitis B from food, water, mosquitoes, toilet seats? Or by kissing and hugging?

No.

Symptoms – how would I know if I got hepatitis B?

Many people who have hepatitis B don't notice any symptoms or signs. This means you can have hepatitis B and not know it. The only way of knowing whether you have hepatitis B is to get tested.

Acute hepatitis B

- If you have acute hepatitis B, you might get joint pain, feel very tired and sick, and lose your appetite. Your skin and the whites of your eyes might go yellow.
- Your pee might be dark, like tea. You might have light coloured poo and feel sick.
- These symptoms can go away after a few weeks.

Chronic hepatitis B

- You might get symptoms such as extreme tiredness, loss of appetite, nausea and vomiting, tummy pain and joint pains.
- If you have chronic hepatitis B you may look and feel well but chronic hepatitis B slowly damages the liver. It can cause liver failure or cancer of the liver.

Testing for hepatitis B

Testing for hepatitis B can be done at the clinic. You can get tested for hepatitis B as part of your men's or women's health check – just ask.

The clinic will take a blood sample. The blood test will show if you have a current hepatitis B infection or if you had hepatitis B in the past but you are no longer infectious. It can also show whether you were vaccinated as a baby and are protected against getting hepatitis B.



If you're pregnant, it's very important that you get tested for hepatitis B. Your partner and family should get tested too.

Don't be shame

Testing for hepatitis B means you're looking after your health and your family's health. If more people in our community test for hepatitis B, everyone is better off.

Test results are confidential. No-one in your family or community will be told about your result without your permission.

Your confidential test results are sent to health departments so we know whether STI and BBV rates are going up or down in a community. The test results are strictly guarded in confidential computers and locked rooms and only used to understand level of infections in a region. Health departments only let a small number of doctors or nurses use the confidential computers with STI or BBV records to keep the information safe.

Treatment for hepatitis B

There is no cure for hepatitis B.

People who have chronic hepatitis B need to look after their general health and get regular checks of their liver health. These are called liver function tests.

Treatments for people with chronic hepatitis B are improving and there is medicine that can slow down the virus in some people.

Letting partners know they need to test

If you are diagnosed with hepatitis B, you will need to let your family and sexual partners know so they can get tested too.

If you have shared injecting or tattoo equipment, you also need to let the people you shared with know they should get tested.

Letting people know they should test for hepatitis B is called 'contact tracing'. The clinic can help you with contact tracing. Contact tracing is not about blame. It's just to make sure that



as many people as possible who may have hepatitis B get tested and treated. It also means that people in the community who don't have hepatitis B find out they can get vaccinated.

Condoms can stop STIs and BBVs from spreading. Here's how to use a condom:

- ⦿ Check expiry date, check the package is not damaged and open with care
- ⦿ Pinch the tip so air doesn't get trapped and roll on when the penis is hard
- ⦿ Use water-based lubricant (lube). Oil based lubricant can damage the condom
- ⦿ When withdrawing, hold the base of the condom so cum doesn't spill out.
- ⦿ Tie a knot in the used condom and put it in the bin. Not down the toilet as it will block the pipes.

Let's look after our health and get tested for hepatitis B. If we all test, we can stop the spread of hepatitis B in our community.