



HEPATITIS B

What is Hepatitis B?

- Hepatitis B (hep B) is a virus that affects the liver. Someone can live with hep B for a long time (20-30 years) before they develop any symptoms, feel sick, or see any sign of liver damage. Without testing, treatment or follow-up from a provider, the liver can become scarred and cause people to become ill.
- Hep B can be very common in certain parts of the world, such as sub-Saharan Africa, East Asia, parts of Central and South America.

What are the symptoms?

Most people have no signs or symptoms of hep B. People who have hep B may have some or all of the following symptoms:

- Fatigue (feeling tired)
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes)
- Dark urine, pale stools
- Abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, poor appetite

How does someone get Hepatitis B?

Hep B is passed through blood, semen (pre-ejaculate), vaginal fluids, rectal fluids and saliva from someone who has the virus. The main ways that hep B is passed between people are:

- Anal or vaginal sex, oral sex, sharing sex toys
- Maternal transmission (during pregnancy or childbirth)
- Sharing needles/syringes or other equipment used to inject drugs (such as cookers, filters, etc) or equipment to snort or smoke drugs such as stems, bills/straws, etc
- Tattoos, body piercing/modifications, acupuncture, manicures or pedicures where non-sterile equipment is used
- Sharing personal hygiene articles such as razors, toothbrushes or nail clippers
- Medical/surgical procedures where infection prevention and control practices are inadequate

Hepatitis B cannot be passed through:

- Shaking hands
- Hugs or kisses

- Coughs or sneezes
- Food or water
- Sharing eating utensils
- Breastfeeding

How do I get tested for hepatitis B?

Hep B is diagnosed with a blood test. This blood test can reveal if an individual currently has hep B, has had hep B in the past (resolved) or has previously received the vaccine. Most tests are accurate within four weeks of exposure but some people may take as long as 3 to 6 months to test positive. You may be encouraged to return for repeat testing.

What happens if I have a positive hepatitis B result?

Your body may clear the virus on its own without treatment within the first 6 months: the majority of adults are able to clear the virus and develop lifelong immunity. However, the majority of infants and children who contract hep B will develop chronic hep B.

- There is no cure for hep B but there are treatment options that can help prevent further damage to your liver.
- To reduce the risk of passing the hep B virus on to your baby, your doctor will ensure that your baby receives an immune globulin injection and hepatitis B vaccine at birth
- Your healthcare provider or public health nurse will provide you with resources, counselling, support, and information to help guide your care, including linking you to community services and/or social workers.
- Your healthcare provider or a public health nurse will help you notify household contacts, sexual and/or drug-equipment sharing partners to encourage them to be tested for hep B, assess their immune status and/or provide vaccine protection to those who are not immune. They can get free hep B vaccination through Ottawa Public Health.

How do I keep my liver healthy?

- Decrease or eliminate alcohol, drug and/or tobacco use
- Get vaccinated for hep B
- Talk to your healthcare provider/pharmacist before starting new medications or natural remedies

How do I practice safer sex?

- Use an internal or external condom, every time you have vaginal and/or anal sex
- Use water-based or silicone-based lubricants

- If you share sex toys, cover the toy with a condom and clean after each use
- Get tested for Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs) regularly

How do I practice safer drug use?

- Use new equipment every time you inject, including needles, syringes and all other supplies (like cookers, filters and water)
- Never share equipment with anyone, including your sex partner(s)
- Access Needle and Syringe Programs or Supervised Consumption Services for new equipment and harm reduction services

For more information:

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