

HEPATITIS B

WHAT IS HEPATITIS B?

Hepatitis B is a viral infection that attacks the liver and can cause both acute and chronic disease. The acute illness can cause liver inflammation, vomiting, jaundice and in rare cases, death. Chronic Hepatitis B can eventually cause liver cirrhosis (scarring of the liver) and liver cancer.

SYMPTOMS

Only 50 per cent of people who are infected by the Hepatitis B virus have symptoms.

People with an acute infection may feel unwell and have loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, pain or tenderness in the right, upper part of the abdomen (where the liver is located), body aches, mild fever and dark urine.

Illness may progress to developing jaundice. Jaundice causes a yellowish appearance of the skin and the whites of the eyes. Chronic infection may be associated with a chronic inflammation of the liver leading to cirrhosis.

Symptoms develop between 45 to 160 days after exposure to the Hepatitis B virus. Ninety per cent of people with acute Hepatitis B infection recover completely, nine per cent of cases go on to carry the virus for the rest of their lives and one per cent die from a severe acute case.

Chronic Hepatitis B carriers may not be aware they carry the virus and may unknowingly infect others.

HOW IT SPREADS

The Hepatitis B virus is found in the blood and other body fluids such as semen or vaginal fluids of an infected person.

You can get the Hepatitis B virus when an infected person's blood or body fluids enter your body through cracks and cuts in your skin, through your mucous membranes, or directly into your blood stream.

People considered at high risk for this infection include:

- Health care providers, embalmers, and emergency workers
- People who have condomless oral, anal, or vaginal sex
- People with multiple sexual partners or who have recently had a sexually transmitted infection
- People who share injecting/non-injecting drug-related equipment
- People who have received blood or blood products prior to 1979 in Canada
- Household and sexual contacts of people who carry the Hepatitis B virus
- People who live or travel to countries with high rates of Hepatitis B
- People receiving salon services including pedicures, manicures, electrolysis, acupuncture, body piercing or tattooing, if equipment is not properly cleaned and disinfected
- Recipients of organ transplantation

DIAGNOSIS

The only way to know if you have Hepatitis B is to get tested. A blood test will show if you currently have Hepatitis B, if you have had Hepatitis B in the past, or if you have already received the vaccine.

TREATMENT

Acute Hepatitis B infection does not usually require treatment because most adults clear the infection spontaneously. There is no cure for chronic Hepatitis B, but treatment of chronic infection may be necessary to reduce the risk of cirrhosis and liver cancer.

PREVENTION

- The most effective way to prevent Hepatitis B is to get the vaccine, especially for individuals living with HIV
- Use a condom during vaginal intercourse and anal intercourse
- Use condoms on sex toys and condoms or oral dams for oral sex
- Do not share equipment to use drugs
- Do not share personal items, such as toothbrushes, dental floss, razors, nail clippers, glucometers, needles
- Treat all blood and body fluids as potentially infectious

People who carry the Hepatitis B virus can do the following to prevent spreading it to others:

- Inform your sexual partners
- Practice safer sex by using condoms from beginning to end of all oral, anal, or vaginal sex.
- Do not donate blood, blood products, organ tissues and semen
- Do not share personal hygiene items such as razor blades, toothbrushes, nail clippers, etc.
- People living with diabetes should not share their glucometer or equipment with others
- Keep cuts and lesions covered
- Inform your health care providers that you have Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is a reportable disease. York Region Community and Health Services must be notified so appropriate follow-up can be done.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- York Region Public Health Sexual Health Clinic Information and Appointment Line:
1-800-361-5653, option 1
- catie.ca
- sexandu.ca