

Hepatitis B

Fact Sheet

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a viral disease of the liver. It can cause permanent damage. A blood test will tell if a person is infected.

What happens if I get Hepatitis B?

The person with hepatitis B may feel tired and feverish and may lose his or her appetite. Jaundice (yellow skin and eyes) may develop. Symptoms may develop 45 to 160 days after exposure.

1% of infected people die within weeks of infection from liver failure.

9% of infected people carry the virus forever. This is called the carrier state. Half of these people eventually die of liver cancer or cirrhosis of the liver. Carriers are infectious and can pass the disease to others without realizing it.

90% of infected people recover after being ill for weeks or months.

How could I catch Hepatitis B?

You catch Hepatitis B through contact with the blood and other body fluids of an infected person.

Examples:

- through sexual intercourse with an infected person
- by an infected mother to her baby at the time of birth
- by sharing needles with an infected person
- through a needle stick injury with a contaminated needle
- through the use of contaminated equipment for body and ear piercing, tattooing and acupuncture
- through broken skin or mucous membranes being exposed to contaminated body fluids
- by receiving a bite from an infected person
- less frequently, when household contacts share personal hygiene items such as razors, nail files and toothbrushes

When is Hepatitis B infectious?

The person may be infectious four to six weeks before symptoms appear, during the course of the illness and for some time after recovery. Recovery could take up to six months.

Is there treatment available?

There is no specific treatment or cure. If someone has the hepatitis B virus he or she is advised to:

- eat a normal, well-balanced diet,
- get sufficient rest,
- limit activities,
- avoid alcohol.

Continued...

Protect Yourself

- Reduce your risk by:
 - limiting the number of sexual partners
 - wearing gloves when handling blood and other body fluids
 - not sharing needles, syringes and other injection equipment
 - not sharing personal items such as toothbrushes, razors, nail files.
- Consider immunization against influenza, hepatitis B and pneumococcal disease. Hepatitis B vaccine is provided to all grade 7 students free of charge. Certain high-risk groups are also provided with hepatitis B and pneumococcal vaccines free of charge.

Other Questions?

Talk to your health care provider or call our Infectious & Communicable Diseases Program at 613-966-5500 x349. Toll Free 1-800-267-2803 | TTY Dial 711 (1-800-267-6511) | hpePublicHealth.ca

References

- Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, The ABC's of Hepatitis, April 2010.
- Ministry of Health & Long-Term Care, Infectious Disease Protocol, 2009.

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