

## Preventing the spread of hepatitis B

Like most infectious diseases, hepatitis B infection is preventable. Some of the ways of preventing the spread of hepatitis B infection include:

- ▶ Hepatitis B vaccination for all those susceptible to infection
- ▶ Ensuring people in close contact with infected individuals are vaccinated
- ▶ Avoiding contact with someone else's blood
- ▶ Not sharing any injecting equipment (for people who inject drugs)
- ▶ Not sharing personal toiletry items, such as toothbrushes, razors, or nail clippers
- ▶ If infected, by not donating blood or sperm
- ▶ Practicing safe sex (using a condom)
- ▶ Get advice from your GP if your job involves potential blood exposure to others

## Treatment and management

Several blood tests are available to diagnose and monitor the progress of infection with hepatitis B. Discuss these tests with your GP or liver specialist.

It is recommended that people with hepatitis B infection seek advice from a GP on treatment options. Your GP will determine what steps to take, depending on your symptoms and the stage of the infection. This may include regular tests and/or antiviral medication.

### Lifestyle advice

- ▶ Eat a healthy and well balanced diet
- ▶ Limit alcohol consumption
- ▶ Reduce or preferably stop smoking
- ▶ Before taking alternative medicines, always discuss with your specialist and GP as some may be harmful to your liver

You may want to take this leaflet with you to discuss with your doctor

To find out more information call:

- ▶ Hepatitis Australia  
Phone: 1300 437222 (National Infoline which diverts to local State/Territory)  
[www.hepatitisaustralia.com](http://www.hepatitisaustralia.com)
- ▶ Cancer Council Help Line 13 11 20  
or visit <http://www.cancer.org.au/Home.htm>
- ▶ Australian Society for HIV Medicine  
[www.ashm.org.au](http://www.ashm.org.au)
- ▶ Gastroenterological Society of Australia  
[www.gesa.org.au/leaflets.cfm](http://www.gesa.org.au/leaflets.cfm)
- ▶ National Hepatitis B Alliance  
See 'Resources-Patients' at:  
<http://alliance.hepatitis.org.au>

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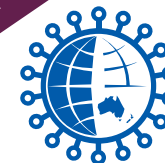
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# Hepatitis B

## Fact Sheet

For people newly diagnosed

Positive



**ashm**  
Australasian Society for HIV Medicine

## What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. It is often caused by infection with a virus, such as the hepatitis B virus. When the hepatitis B virus enters the body, it travels to the liver, where it lives and multiplies. Unfortunately, it is the body's attempt to kill the virus that causes most of the inflammation and damage to the liver.

The impact of hepatitis B infection depends on the person's age when they get the infection. Infants with hepatitis B infection almost always develop long-term (chronic) infection; people who get the infection as adults have a 95% chance of clearing the virus from the body.

Many people with hepatitis B do not show symptoms and so they are unaware that they are infected with the virus. Some people may experience tiredness, nausea (feeling sick) and jaundice (yellowing of the eyes and skin), but infants rarely develop symptoms of infection. About 50% of adolescents and adults develop jaundice when they first get the infection, which is called acute hepatitis B.

## Chronic hepatitis B

A person is diagnosed with chronic hepatitis B when they have the virus infection for longer than 6 months (confirmed through blood tests).

Chronic hepatitis B develops in approximately 5% of adults, some children and most infants who contract the infection.

People with chronic hepatitis B are likely to have a lifelong infection, and although they generally remain in good health, they have an increased risk of developing serious complications, such as cirrhosis (scarring of the liver) and liver cancer.

Importantly, people with hepatitis B have the potential to spread the infection to others, unless they follow some simple precautions.

## How is hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B is spread when blood or other bodily fluids from an infected person (like saliva, breast milk, semen, and vaginal fluids) enter the body of a person susceptible to infection. Hepatitis B can be spread as follows:

- ▶ A pregnant woman infected with hepatitis B can transmit the infection to her baby
- ▶ Vaginal, anal, or oral sex without a condom
- ▶ Reusing needles, syringes and other injecting equipment
- ▶ Tattooing or body piercing
- ▶ Sharing of toothbrushes, razors, or nail clippers with an infected person
- ▶ Blood transfusion (very rare in Australia)
- ▶ Accidental needlestick injury or splashing of infected blood or bodily fluids
- ▶ Contact sport, if injuries lead to contact with infected blood

## Symptoms of the infection

Many people infected with the hepatitis B virus do not display any symptoms. However, acute infection may result in the following symptoms:

- ▶ Loss of appetite
- ▶ Nausea and vomiting
- ▶ Tiredness
- ▶ Jaundice (yellowish eyes and skin)
- ▶ Pain in the abdomen (stomach area)
- ▶ Muscle and joint pain

## Who should be vaccinated against hepatitis B?

They include:

- ▶ All infants and young children
- ▶ Migrants born in countries with high rates of Hepatitis B infection (e.g. South East Asia, the Pacific Islands, Southern or Eastern Europe, or Africa)
- ▶ Youth aged between 10-13 years (if not previously vaccinated)
- ▶ Household contacts of people with acute and chronic hepatitis B infection
- ▶ Sexually active partners of infected individuals
- ▶ Recipients of blood products
- ▶ Healthcare and emergency workers
- ▶ Men who have sex with Men (MSM)
- ▶ Intravenous Drug Users (IDU)

## Do I need to tell others?

Your hepatitis B test result is personal. You do not have to tell anyone straight away, however, you are required to take precautions to prevent the spread of infection as outline below.

You are advised to tell your sexual partners and close household contacts so that they may be tested and vaccinated.

If you are a health care worker, you must not perform 'exposure prone' procedures (refer to support services in this fact sheet for more information). If you are in the Australian armed forces you will be required to disclose if you have chronic hepatitis B infection.