

Your sexual health Hepatitis B

- travel to countries where hepatitis B is common (ask your GP or travel health specialist)
- are an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person
- work in an industry that brings you into contact with blood or other body fluids
- are a health care worker.

Treatment

If you are exposed to hepatitis B, it is important that you see a doctor immediately after you think you may have been exposed to assess the need for testing and vaccination.

People with chronic hepatitis B should be monitored regularly (every 6-12 months) by their GP for signs and symptoms of liver disease.

There is treatment available for chronic hepatitis B that can reduce the progress of liver damage and loss of liver function.

Where to go

Contact your GP or a doctor of your choice, local Population Health Unit, community nurse or health worker, or

Central Immunisation Clinic

(08) 9321 1312

Sexual Health Helpline

(08) 9227 6178 or 1800 198 205 free call from landlines and some mobiles

HepatitisWA

(08) 9328 8538 or 1800 800 070 free call from landlines and some mobiles

For more information contact

Your GP or a doctor of your choice

Sexual Health Helpline

9224 6178 or 1800 198 205 free call from landlines and some mobiles

Regional population health units

(Those in bold provide clinical services)

Albany 9842 7500

Broome 9194 1630

Bunbury 9781 2350

Carnarvon 9941 0500

Geraldton 9956 1980

Kalgoorlie – Boulder 9080 8200

Northam 9622 4320

South Hedland 9174 1321

You can find more information about hepatitis on the internet:

www.healthywa.wa.gov.au

www.hepatitiswa.com.au

www.hepatitisaustralia.com

www.cdc.gov/ncidod/diseases/hepatitis

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This document can be made available in alternative formats on request for a person with disability.

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What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. It can be caused by viruses such as hepatitis A, B, C, D, E and G, alcohol, some chemicals and drugs.

Signs and symptoms

About half of all adults and most children with hepatitis B have no symptoms at all. Some people feel well for several months before having any symptoms.

Symptoms include:

- fever
- extreme tiredness for weeks or months
- loss of appetite, nausea (feeling sick) and vomiting
- joint pains
- eyes or skin turning yellow (jaundice).

If you or your child develops these symptoms, see your doctor for a health check and a blood test for hepatitis.

Most adults recover completely. They can't become infected with hepatitis B again.

However, some adults and children, and most babies infected with hepatitis B will not get rid of the virus and will develop a chronic (or lifelong) infection. A person is diagnosed as having chronic hepatitis B if the virus remains in their blood for more than six months.

People with chronic hepatitis B often don't feel sick, but can develop serious liver diseases, including liver failure and liver cancer, 20 or more years after first getting hepatitis B.

People with chronic hepatitis B can infect other people, even if they feel well and don't have any symptoms.

How is it spread?

Hepatitis B is very infectious.

The hepatitis B virus is mainly spread through direct contact with infected blood (even tiny amounts of blood) and blood products, but you can also be infected through other body fluids including semen and vaginal fluids.

You can become infected with hepatitis B:

- by having vaginal, oral or anal sex with a person with chronic hepatitis B if you don't use a condom
- from sharing needles, syringes and other drug injecting equipment with a person with chronic hepatitis B
- if your work involves possible contact with human blood or body fluids (for example, health care workers, emergency services, funeral workers).

If you have chronic hepatitis B, your baby can be infected during birth or soon after. It is important that your baby receives hepatitis B immune globulin and vaccination within 48 hours of birth. Your doctor or midwife will advise you about this. It is safe for a mother with chronic hepatitis B to breastfeed her baby.

If you share a house with a person with chronic hepatitis B, you need to be especially careful (see Protecting yourself).

In Australia, you are very unlikely to get hepatitis B through blood transfusion or organ transplantation.

Protecting yourself

The best way to protect yourself against hepatitis B is to get vaccinated. For adults this involves 3 injections over 6 months.

There are some other simple ways to protect yourself against hepatitis B and other infections:

- **Avoid sharing needles, syringes or any drug injecting equipment.** Wash your hands or wipe your fingers with a new alcohol swab before and after injecting yourself or another person. Always use new, sterile needles and syringes. You can get these from most chemists, needle and syringe exchanges, and at country hospitals after hours.
- **Practice safer sex – use a condom or dam and lubricant.** The risk increases with the number of sexual partners, anal sex and/or sex during a woman's period.
- **Before considering any body art** (such as tattooing or piercing) make sure the body artist uses only sterilised equipment, and new razors, inks, and needles each time.
- **Don't share personal hygiene items**, such as razors, combs, nail brushes, and toothbrushes.
- Clean and cover any bleeding cuts and grazes immediately.
- Wear gloves and use paper towels (or disposable cloths) when cleaning up blood spills. Wash the area with soapy water, then wipe over with household bleach. Wrap the towels and gloves in a plastic bag before putting them in the bin.
- Health care workers should always use infection control procedures at work.

Should I be vaccinated?

Since 2000, every baby born in Australia can receive a free hepatitis B vaccine at birth and further doses at 2, 4 and 6 months of age.

Sexual partners and people living with a person with chronic hepatitis B should be tested for hepatitis B. If not immune, they should be vaccinated.

Vaccination is also free to some high-risk groups – ask your GP. Your GP or health worker may take a blood test to see if you are already immune.

Hepatitis B vaccination is recommended if you:

- ever take part in injecting drug use; tattooing and body piercing; unprotected vaginal, oral or anal sex with casual partners; or sex work
- are a man who has sex with other men
- have HIV or any other chronic disease that impairs your immune system
- have a chronic liver disease (including chronic hepatitis C)
- are on kidney dialysis or have severely impaired kidney function
- are receiving certain blood products (e.g. people with clotting disorders who receive blood product concentrates, people with recurrent transfusion requirements)
- are receiving a solid organ or stem cell transplant
- attend or live in a residential care facility for people with developmental disabilities
- are an inmate of a custodial institution (prison)
- are a migrant from a country where hepatitis B is common