



## Community Health Connections

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# Fact Sheet

## Hepatitis B

### What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a contagious liver disease that results from infection with the hepatitis B virus. It can range from mild and lasting only a few weeks, to serious and lifelong. Hepatitis B can be either “acute” or “chronic”.

**Acute hepatitis B virus infection** is a short-term illness that occurs within the first 6 months after someone is exposed to the virus. Acute infection can—but does not always—lead to chronic infection.

**Chronic hepatitis B virus infection** is a long-term illness that occurs when the hepatitis B virus remains in a person’s body.

Many with hepatitis B are not aware of their infection.

### How is hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B is usually spread when blood, semen, or another body fluid from a person infected with the hepatitis B virus enters the body of someone who is not infected. This can happen through sexual contact with an infected person or sharing needles, syringes, or other drug-injection equipment. Hepatitis B can also be passed from an infected mother to her baby at birth.

**Hepatitis B is not spread through** sharing eating utensils, hugging, kissing, holding hands, coughing, sneezing or breastfeeding. Unlike some forms of hepatitis, hepatitis B is not spread by contaminated food or water.

**Hepatitis B is most commonly spread through** sexual contact. The hepatitis B virus is 50-100 times more infectious than HIV and can be passed through the exchange of body fluids such as semen, vaginal fluids, and blood.

### What are symptoms of acute hepatitis B?

Not everyone has symptoms with acute hepatitis. Most have symptoms that appear within three

months of exposure and can last from a few weeks to several months.

### Symptoms of acute hepatitis B

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fever</li> <li>• Fatigue</li> <li>• Loss of appetite</li> <li>• Nausea</li> <li>• Vomiting</li> <li>• Jaundice</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Abdominal pain</li> <li>• Dark urine</li> <li>• Clay-colored bowel movements</li> <li>• Joint pain</li> </ul> |
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### What are the symptoms of chronic hepatitis B?

Many with chronic hepatitis B remain symptom free for up to 30 years, but others experience ongoing symptoms similar to those of acute hepatitis B. Chronic hepatitis B is a serious disease that can result in long-term health problems.

### How is hepatitis B diagnosed and treated?

Blood tests are used to diagnose hepatitis B. There is no medication available to treat acute hepatitis B, so doctors usually recommend rest, adequate nutrition, and fluids. Those with chronic hepatitis B virus infection should be monitored regularly for signs of liver disease. Some people benefit from treatment with specific medications.

### How serious is chronic hepatitis B?

Over time, about 15%-25% of people with chronic hepatitis B develop serious liver problems, including liver damage, cirrhosis, liver failure and liver cancer. Every year, up to 4,000 people in the United States and more than 600,000 people worldwide die from hepatitis B-related liver disease.

### Can hepatitis B be prevented?

Yes. The best way to prevent hepatitis B is by getting vaccinated. For adults, the hepatitis B vaccine series is usually given as 3 shots during a 6-month period. The entire series is needed for long-term protection. However, once a person has been infected with the hepatitis B virus, the vaccine does not provide protection against the disease.