



## FACT SHEET

### Hepatitis B Virus

Hepatitis B is a viral infection of the liver.

**Cause:** Hepatitis B virus (HBV)

**Symptoms:** The symptoms of Hepatitis B include loss of appetite, abdominal discomfort, nausea and vomiting, joint pain or rash. Some people develop jaundice (yellowing of the whites of the eyes and skin). Less than 10% of children and 30-50% of adults with Hepatitis B infection will have symptoms severe enough to seek medical help. The symptoms of Hepatitis B are indistinguishable from other types of hepatitis. People with chronic Hepatitis B infection are at risk for developing cirrhosis of the liver and liver cancer.

**Spread:** Exposure to an infected person's blood through cuts or breaks in the skin or through the mucous membranes. Close personal contact: such as sharing items such as razors, toothbrushes, or needles for piercing ears or making tattoos. Anyone can get Hepatitis B, but those at greater risk include: I.V. drug users who share needles; health care workers who have contact with infected blood or body fluids; homosexual men, especially those with multiple partners; heterosexual men and women with multiple partners; and hemodialysis patients

**Incubation:** Approximately 45-180 days; average incubation period of 60-90 days.

#### Contagious

**Period:** The virus can be shed from several weeks before onset of symptoms to several months after recovery. People with chronic infection have varying degrees of infectivity. People who are *e* antigen (HBeAg) positive are considered to be highly infectious, while those who are *e* antibody (anti-HBe) are sparingly infectious.

**Precautions:** Standard Precautions. People infected with Hepatitis B should follow standard hygienic practices to ensure that close contacts are not directly contaminated by his or her blood or other body fluids. These practices include not sharing razors, toothbrushes, needles, or any other object that may have become contaminated with blood. Use of latex condoms may reduce transmission during sexual activity. Susceptible household contacts, particularly sexual partners, should be immunized with the Hepatitis B vaccine. Infected people should not donate blood.

**Reportable:** By the provider or lab to the local or state health department

#### Diagnosis and

**Treatment:** Diagnosis is confirmed by lab results for antigens and/or antibodies. Currently, there is no treatment for acute Hepatitis B infection. Alpha interferon and lamivudine (3TC) are licensed for the treatment of

chronic hepatitis B infections. Other medications are under study and may be approved in the future.

**Prevention:**

Infection with Hepatitis B can be prevented either before or after exposure to the virus. To prevent disease before exposure, the Hepatitis B vaccine is recommended for **all infants** and for people in high risk groups.

Hepatitis B is the only sexually transmitted disease that is vaccine preventable. The vaccine is safe and effective. You only need a series of three (3) shots over a period of six (6) months.

To prevent disease after exposure, Hepatitis B immune globulin (HBIG) is given along with the vaccine. Because infants whose mothers are infected with Hepatitis B are exposed during childbirth, all pregnant women should be screened for Hepatitis B. Infants of infectious mothers should receive HBIG and Hepatitis B vaccine within 12 hours of birth.