

# Hepatitis B

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## What is Hepatitis?

Hepatitis (pronounced: hep-uh-tie-tiss) is a disease of the liver. It is usually caused by a virus, although it can also be caused by long-term overuse of alcohol or other toxins (poisons).

Although there are several different types of hepatitis, hepatitis B is a type that can move from one person to another through blood and other bodily fluids. It can be transmitted through sexual intercourse and through needles - such as those shared by intravenous drug or steroid users who have the virus, or tattoo needles that haven't been properly sterilized. A pregnant woman can also pass hepatitis B to her unborn baby. You cannot catch hepatitis B from an object, such as a toilet seat.

## What are the Symptoms of Hepatitis B?

Someone with hepatitis B may have symptoms similar to those caused by other viral infections, such as the flu - for example, tiredness, nausea, loss of appetite, mild fever, and vomiting - as well as abdominal pain or pain underneath the right ribcage where the liver is.

Hepatitis B can also cause jaundice, which is a yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes, and may cause the urine to appear brownish.

## How long until symptoms appear?

Someone who has been exposed to hepatitis B may have symptoms 1 to 4 months later. Some people with hepatitis B don't notice symptoms until they become quite severe. Some have few or no symptoms, but even someone who doesn't notice any symptoms can still transmit the disease to others. Some people carry the virus in their bodies and are contagious for the rest of their lives.

## What can happen with Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B can be very dangerous to a person's health, leading to liver damage and an increased risk of liver cancer. Of babies born to women who have the hepatitis B virus, 90% will have the virus unless they receive a special immune injection and the first dose of hepatitis B vaccine at birth.

## How Hepatitis B can be prevented?

Because hepatitis B can easily be transmitted through blood and most body fluids, it can be prevented by:

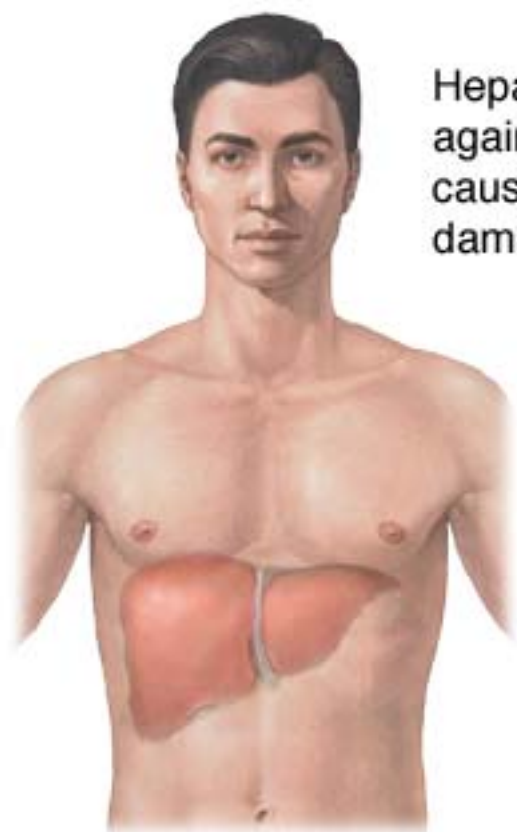
- Abstaining from sex (not having oral, vaginal, or anal sex).
- Always using latex condoms for all types of sexual intercourse.
- Avoiding contact with an infected person's blood.

- Not using intravenous drugs or sharing any drug paraphernalia.

- Not sharing things like toothbrushes or razors.

Tattoo parlors sometimes reuse needles without properly sterilizing them, so be sure to research and choose tattoo and piercing providers carefully.

To help prevent the spread of hepatitis B, health care professionals wear gloves at all times when in contact with blood or body fluids, and are usually required to be immunized against the hepatitis B virus.



Hepatitis B vaccine protects against serious disease causing inflammation and damage to the liver



ADAM.

There is an immunization (vaccine) against hepatitis B. The immunization is given as a series of three shots over a 6-month period. Newborn babies in the United States now routinely receive this immunization series. Teens who see their health care provider for yearly exams are also likely to be given the hepatitis B immunization if they haven't had it before. Immunization programs have been responsible for a significant drop in the number of cases of hepatitis B among teens over the past 10 years.

Sometimes, if someone has been recently exposed to the hepatitis B virus, a doctor may recommend a shot of immune globulin containing antibodies against the virus to try to prevent the person from coming down with the disease. For this reason, it's especially important to see a doctor quickly after any possible exposure to the virus.

### How Hepatitis B is Treated?

If you think you may have hepatitis B or if you have been intimate with someone who may have hepatitis B, you need to see your doctor or gynecologist. He or she will do blood tests, and if a diagnosis of hepatitis B is made, you may also be treated with medicines to help fight it.



Sometimes, people need to be hospitalized for a little while if they are too sick to eat or drink. Most people with hepatitis B feel better within 6 months.

***Disclaimer:** Our goal is to provide you with information that may be useful in attaining optimal health. Nothing in it is meant as a prescription or as medical advice.*

***Reviewed by:** Larissa Hirsch, MD*