



Facts At-A-Glance

- Hepatitis B is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV).
- HBV is spread by direct contact with bodily fluids such as blood, semen, and vaginal secretions.
- Most adults (95%) are able to fight off HBV within six months. Others have long-term HBV infection known as chronic HBV.
- About 5% of adults infected during adulthood develop chronic HBV. Up to 95% of infants infected at birth develop chronic HBV.
- About 1 in 20 Americans have been infected with HBV. As many as 1 in 10 Asian and Pacific Islander Americans have chronic HBV.
- Vaccination is the best way to prevent HBV.
- Many people with HBV have no symptoms.
- HBV is diagnosed by blood tests.
- Chronic HBV can lead to cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, liver cancer, and liver failure.
- For some patients, medications can help fight HBV.



Your Liver. Your Life.

American Liver Foundation
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1-800-GO-LIVER

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Hepatitis B



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Why is the liver important?

The liver is the second largest organ in your body and is located under your rib cage on the right side. It weighs about three pounds and is shaped like a football that is flat on one side.

The liver performs many jobs in your body. It processes what you eat and drink into energy and nutrients your body can use. The liver also removes harmful substances from your blood.

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a liver disease caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). HBV causes the liver to swell and prevents it from working well.

About 95% of adults who are exposed to HBV fully recover within six months (acute HBV) without medication. About 5% have HBV all their lives (chronic HBV) unless they are successfully treated with medications. Infants born to mothers infected with HBV are at high risk of developing chronic HBV. Chronic HBV can lead to cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, liver cancer, and liver failure.

Who is at risk of having hepatitis B?

Anyone who has come in direct contact with HBV-infected bodily fluids (blood, semen, and vaginal secretions) is at risk.

- Were born to an HBV-infected mother
- Have ever worked with or come in contact with infected bodily fluids
- Have ever lived with an infected person
- Have ever had unprotected sex with an infected person
- Have ever had multiple sexual partners
- Have ever had a sexually transmitted disease
- Are a man who has sex with men
- Have ever injected or inhaled drugs (even once)
- Have ever worked or been housed in a prison
- Have ever traveled to countries where HBV is common
- Have ever been on hemodialysis

What are symptoms of hepatitis B?

Many people with acute or chronic HBV have no symptoms. When symptoms occur, they may include tiredness, fever, loss of appetite, nausea, headache, muscle soreness, pain near the liver, and jaundice (yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes).

Symptoms often begin two to five months after infection. Symptoms usually last for several weeks, but can last up to six months.

How is hepatitis B diagnosed?

Hepatitis B is diagnosed by blood tests.

Blood tests are done to check if HBV antibodies are in the body. Antibodies are proteins created by the immune system in response to viruses.

How is hepatitis B treated?

Acute HBV

Doctors often recommend bed rest, drinking lots of fluids, eating a healthy diet and avoiding alcohol. Medicines are not used to treat acute HBV. It is important to see your doctor regularly to make sure your body has fully recovered from the virus.

Chronic HBV

There are several treatment options for chronic HBV: tenofovir, adefovir dipivoxil, interferon alfa 2b, pegylated interferon alfa 2a, lamivudine, entecavir, and telbivudine. These medicines may not work for all people with hepatitis B. Also, patients taking these medicines need to be monitored by their doctors for side effects.

HBV medications should not be taken by pregnant women unless recommended by their doctors. Some pregnant women with HBV can be treated to prevent transmitting HBV to their babies.

If you have HBV, it is important to talk to your doctor about treatment options and liver cancer screenings every 6-12 months. Also, talk to your doctor about the hepatitis A vaccine.

What is the best way to stop the spread of hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B vaccination in people who have not been exposed to HBV is the best way to prevent infection. The hepatitis B vaccine is given in 3 doses. The first 2 doses are given one month apart and the final dose is given 6 months later.

Other ways to stop the spread of HBV are:

- Getting tested if you are pregnant or want to become pregnant
- Not sharing needles
- Practicing safe sex
- Not sharing razors, toothbrushes, or other personal items
- Not donating blood, organs, or tissue
- Using only clean needles and equipment for tattoos or body piercings
- Telling your doctors, dentists, and other healthcare providers

Who should be vaccinated against hepatitis B?

Those who should be vaccinated against HBV include:

- All newborns and children
- People with liver disease not caused by HBV
- People with HIV
- Healthcare and emergency workers, military personnel, morticians and embalmers
- People who have ever been on hemodialysis
- People working or housed in prisons
- Staff and patients at institutions for the developmentally challenged
- People with multiple sexual partners
- Men who have sex with men
- People who have ever injected or inhaled drugs
- Sexual partners and household members of people with HBV
- Travelers to countries where HBV is common
- Members of ethnic or racial groups with a high rate of HBV infection including Asian and Pacific Islander Americans, African Americans, Latino Americans, Native Americans and Alaskan Natives