

# HEPATITIS B

## What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a serious liver infection caused by the Hepatitis B virus (HBV). For some people, the infection becomes chronic, leading to liver failure, liver cancer, or cirrhosis.

- Acute Hepatitis B virus infection is a short-term illness that occurs within the first 6 months after someone is exposed to the Hepatitis B virus. Acute infection can 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.

## Symptoms of Hepatitis B

Although a majority of adults develop symptoms from acute Hepatitis B virus infection, many young children do not. Symptoms of acute Hepatitis B, if they appear, can include:

- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Fever
- Joint pain
- Dark urine
- Loss of appetite
- Abdominal pain
- Clay-colored bowel movements
- Jaundice (yellow color of the eyes or skin)

On average, symptoms appear 90 days (or 3 months) after exposure, but they can appear any time between 6 weeks and 6 months after exposure.

## How do People get Hepatitis B?

Contact with infectious blood, semen, and other body fluids from having sex with an infected person, sharing contaminated needles to inject drugs, or from an infected mother to her newborn.

## Diagnosis and Treatment of Hepatitis B

Because many people with Hepatitis B don't have signs and symptoms, doctors diagnose the disease on the basis of one or more blood tests.

There is no medication available to treat acute Hepatitis B. During this short-term infection, doctors usually recommend rest, adequate nutrition and fluids.

Several medications have been approved for Hepatitis B treatment, and new drugs are in development. However, not every person with chronic Hepatitis B needs to be on medication. People with chronic Hepatitis B should be monitored regularly by a doctor experienced in caring for people with Hepatitis B.

## How Can I Help Prevent the Spread of Hepatitis B?

Although no cure exists for Hepatitis B, the vaccine can prevent the disease.

If you're already infected, taking certain precautions can help prevent spreading HBV to others. Practice safe sex. Tell your sexual partner(s) you have HBV. Don't share needles or syringes. Don't donate blood or organs. Don't share razor blades or toothbrushes. If you're pregnant, tell your doctor you have HBV.



**For more information, contact a Public Health Nurse at the City-County Health Department at 454-6950 or visit [www.cchdmt.org](http://www.cchdmt.org) or [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)**