

Commonly Asked Questions About Hepatitis B

Key facts

1. Many people with hepatitis B don't have any symptoms.
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends testing for everyone 18 years of age and older.
3. Hepatitis B is spread through contact with infected blood and bodily fluids.
4. Vaccination is the best way to prevent hepatitis B infection.

What is hepatitis B virus?

Hepatitis B is a virus that causes a liver infection. The infection can be acute (a new infection) or chronic (a long-term infection). For some people, acute hepatitis B virus (HBV) will be short-term, but acute infections can become chronic.

HBV can cause serious health problems over time, including liver damage, liver failure, and liver cancer.

Most adults who become newly infected with HBV are able to resolve their infection. But infants and young children who become infected with HBV are less likely to resolve their infection and will often develop a chronic, life-long infection.

What are the symptoms of HBV?

Many people do not show symptoms of illness, but they can still spread the disease to others. Those who do experience symptoms usually experience them within the first few weeks or months of infection.

Symptoms can include abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, fever, tiredness, loss of appetite, yellow skin or eyes (jaundice), dark urine, and clay-colored stool.

How does HBV spread from person to person?

HBV is transmitted through contact with infected blood or bodily fluids. This means that a person becomes infected when the blood or bodily fluids of a person with HBV enters their body.

- From parent to child during pregnancy or birth.
- Unprotected sex or sex with multiple partners increases the risk.
- Sharing needles or other drug use equipment like syringes, cotton, and cookers.
- Less frequent ways that HBV is spread include sharing personal items like razors or toothbrushes, needlestick injuries, and tattoos or piercings outside of a licensed facility.

Hepatitis B is **not** spread by:

- Sharing food or eating utensils.
- Casual contact like hugging, kissing, or holding hands.

How can HBV be prevented?

The best way to prevent HBV is by getting vaccinated. There is a safe and effective vaccine to protect against HBV, and vaccination is recommended for:

- Infants.
- Children who have not been vaccinated.
- Adults 19-59 years of age.
- Adults ages 60 years of age and older at higher risk for hepatitis B.

Free or low-cost vaccine is available for children and adults who do not have health insurance or

whose insurance does not cover the cost of vaccines. Get more information about the Minnesota Vaccines for Children (MnVFC) program and the Uninsured and Underinsured Adult Vaccine (UUAV) program on [Where to Get Vaccinated \(www.health.state.mn.us/people/immunize/basics/vaxfinder.html\)](http://www.health.state.mn.us/people/immunize/basics/vaxfinder.html).

Who should be tested for HBV?

Pregnant persons should be tested during each pregnancy for HBV. This testing consists of a hepatitis B surface antigen test (HBsAg) completed during the first trimester of pregnancy.

The CDC recommends one-time screening for HBV for every person 18 years of age and older. The screening should be done using a triple panel. The triple panel includes HBsAg, antibody to hepatitis B surface antigen (anti-HBs), and antibody to hepatitis B core antigen (total anti-HBc).

- HBsAg: Screening test for HBV. It is used to determine if someone is infected with HBV.
- Anti-HBs: Test for immunity to HBV. A positive result on this test would indicate immunity from vaccination or a past infection.
- Total anti-HBc: A positive result on this test would indicate a current or past HBV infection.

Routine testing is recommended for people with ongoing risk factors.

What should a person with HBV limit or avoid?

People with HBV should avoid or limit alcohol consumption. It is important to check with a health care provider before taking any prescription or over-the-counter medications or

supplements, as some medications can be toxic to the liver.

Is there treatment for HBV?

There is no cure for HBV. But antiviral treatment and routine monitoring by a health care provider can improve the length and quality of life for those living with HBV.

Can someone with HBV donate blood, plasma, or organs?

No, people with current or past HBV infection cannot donate blood, plasma, or organs.

Minnesota Department of Health
PO Box 64975
St. Paul, MN 55164-0975
651-201-5414
www.health.state.mn.us/hepatitis

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