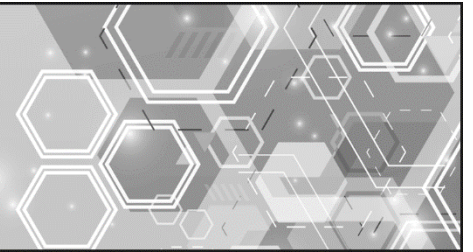




Durham Region Health Department **Facts about...**



Hepatitis B

What is it?

Hepatitis B is a virus that can attack and damage the liver. Many people who have the virus may not know that they have been infected unless a blood test is taken.

Some hepatitis B carriers may develop chronic (life-long) liver disease and are at risk for liver scarring (called cirrhosis) and liver cancer.

How is it spread?

People who have acute hepatitis B infection, or who are hepatitis B carriers, can spread the infection. Sexual contact without using a condom (especially oral, anal and vaginal sex) is the most common way of being infected. Hepatitis B can be spread:

- Through blood, blood products, saliva, semen, vaginal fluid and other fluid containing blood.
- By sharing needles (e.g., injecting drugs, tattooing, body piercing) or personal items (e.g., toothbrushes, razors, manicure tools) with a person who is infected.
- To sexual partner(s), those who live in close contact with a person who is infected, and those who share needles for injecting drugs.
- To babies of women who are carriers of hepatitis B around the time of birth. Pregnant women should have their blood checked for hepatitis B. If positive, the baby will receive the hepatitis B vaccine.

What do I look for?

Symptoms usually come on slowly and include loss of appetite, stomach discomfort, feeling very tired, joint pain, fever and jaundice (where skin and whites of eyes turn yellow) and dark urine dark. Symptoms often start in 2-3 months, but can start as late as 9 months, after being infected. While most adults recover fully, death from acute hepatitis B can occur. Blood tests are required to confirm diagnosis of Hepatitis B.

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If you require this information in an accessible format, contact 1-800-841-2729.



How is it treated?

Treatment is available for some people. Anybody with chronic hepatitis B should be referred to a health care provider for follow up.

How can I protect myself and others?

- Hepatitis B is best prevented by immunization (See *Facts About...Hepatitis B Vaccine*).
- Always practice safer sex and use latex condoms when having oral, anal or vaginal sex.
- Avoid sharing personal hygiene items (e.g., razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers).
- Carefully investigate personal body services and make sure you go to a technician who uses new and/or sterile equipment for each customer.
- Do not share needles or drug injection equipment.
- If you use needles to take drugs, always use a new needle each time. You can get new, clean needles and injection equipment from Project X Change (John Howard Society of Durham).
- If you come in contact with human blood or blood products see a health care provider right away.

What if I have hepatitis B?

- Do not have sex without a condom until your partner is seen by a doctor/health care provider, given the hepatitis B vaccine and is immune. Hepatitis B vaccine is free of charge for sexual partners and close contacts.
- Never share needles or other personal items such as razors and toothbrushes.
- Do not donate blood, body fluids (e.g., semen), sperm, or organs.
- Avoid alcohol to protect your liver.
- Talk to your doctor about receiving the Hepatitis A and Pneumococcal vaccine which you can receive for free from your doctor/health care provider.
- Continue to have ongoing monitoring by your doctor.
- If you are pregnant talk to your doctor about the care your baby will need after birth, including vaccinations.

May 16, 2023

