

## Summary:

- Hepatitis B is a serious disease but it can be prevented.
- It is spread by coming in contact with blood or body fluids of an infected person.
- Vaccination and good hygiene can protect you from hepatitis B.

# Someone you know has Hepatitis B

If you have been in contact with someone with hepatitis B, this leaflet will give you the information you need.



Feidhmeannacht na Seirbhíse Sláinte  
Health Service Executive



## How can I learn more?

Useful information on hepatitis B can be found from the following sources:

- Your family doctor
- Local public health department of the HSE

You can get other leaflets about hepatitis B on the following websites:

- [www.hpsc.ie](http://www.hpsc.ie)
- [www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hbv](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hbv)
- [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)
- [www.immunisation.ie](http://www.immunisation.ie)
- [www.emitoolkit.ie](http://www.emitoolkit.ie)



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## What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a virus that affects the liver and can make you seriously ill. Some people with hepatitis B never get rid of the virus and may stay infected for life. This is chronic hepatitis B infection and people who have it are called "carriers."

Some carriers go on to develop severe liver disease. Some carriers have no symptoms and may be unaware that they are infectious so they may spread the virus to others without knowing.

## How is it spread?

Hepatitis B is spread by exposure to the blood or body fluids of an infected person. You can catch hepatitis B if you:

- Have sex with a person carrying hepatitis B.
- Share needles or other equipment when injecting drugs.
- Use unsterilised needles for body piercing, tattooing, acupuncture, electrolysis, or if you have been injected with a used needle.
- Share razors, toothbrushes, washcloths, towels, nail clippers or anything that might have blood or other body fluids on them.
- Come in contact with bleeding sores or cuts of an infected person.
- Are a health care worker or other person exposed to infected blood or body fluids.
- Are the child of a hepatitis B carrier.

In some cases, a definite source of infection is never identified.

## You **CANNOT** get hepatitis B by

- Sneezing or coughing
- Kissing or hugging
- Breastfeeding
- Food or water
- Sharing dishes or glasses
- Casual contact (such as at work)

## What can I do to protect myself?

- Hepatitis B vaccine is a safe, effective vaccine and your best protection. The vaccine is given in a course of three injections. After three injections, a blood test may sometimes be taken to check if you are now protected. Side effects may be a sore arm and redness where you were injected.
- If you are pregnant or wish to become pregnant it is best to discuss this with your doctor before getting vaccinated.
- Do not touch blood or body fluids, or any tissues that have been soiled with these, of someone who has hepatitis B infection.
- If you are exposed to the blood of someone with hepatitis B infection and have not been protected against the infection by vaccination, you can be protected from hepatitis B if you get treatment quickly. You should go to your doctor or Emergency Department and say you have been in contact with hepatitis B. You will get an injection of hepatitis B immunoglobulin (HBIG) and start the hepatitis B vaccine course.
- Do not share toothbrushes, razors, needles, nail files, nail clippers, nail scissors, washcloths or towels with someone who has hepatitis B infection.
- If you inject drugs, stop injecting or get into a rehab program. Never share drugs, needles, syringes, cotton, water or rinse cups.
- Use condoms.

## Will I feel sick if I get hepatitis B?

It can take six weeks to six months from the time you are infected before any symptoms appear. Different people get different symptoms, such as:

- Yellowish skin and eyes (jaundice)
- Loss of appetite
- Extreme tiredness
- A feeling that you want to vomit
- Fever
- Dark urine
- Discomfort in the abdomen

Some people never feel sick with hepatitis B.

## How do I know if I have hepatitis B?

Only a blood test can tell for sure. You should go to your family doctor or sexual health clinic to discuss your concerns. If you do not have the infection, you can get a vaccine to protect yourself against hepatitis B.

# GET VACCINATED!