

- Your sex partner is at risk of getting hepatitis B from you. Tell your sex partner(s) that you have hepatitis B. They must see a doctor for a blood test to see if they are infected. If they are not infected they should be vaccinated. Use condoms until your partner is protected.
- Other people living in your home are at risk. Tell everyone who lives with you that they should see their doctor for a blood test and vaccination.
- If you develop chronic hepatitis B infection tell any new sex partners and any new people living with you that they should get tested and vaccinated.
- If you are pregnant, the new baby needs to get the vaccine and hepatitis B immunoglobulin (HBIG) shortly after birth.
- If someone is exposed to your blood they can be protected from hepatitis B if they get treatment quickly. They should go to their doctor or Emergency Department and say they have been in contact with hepatitis B. They will get an injection of hepatitis B immunoglobulin (HBIG) and start the hepatitis B vaccine course.
- Tell your doctor and dentist that you have hepatitis B.

You **cannot** spread hepatitis B by

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

You **should not** be excluded from childcare, school, work, or other activities because you have hepatitis B. If you need advice about hepatitis B and your work, your specialist will advise you.

Remember:

Advise your contacts they should be vaccinated.

Use a condom during sex to protect your partner and yourself.



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 information and leaflets about hepatitis B on the following websites

- www.hpsc.ie
- www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hbv
- www.who.int
- www.immunisation.ie
- www.emitoolkit.ie



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Hepatitis B And You

What you need to know when you are newly diagnosed



What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a virus that affects the liver and can make you seriously ill. It can take six weeks to six months from the time you are infected before symptoms appear. This stage of the illness is called acute hepatitis B.

Some people with acute hepatitis B do not get any symptoms. If you do get symptoms, these can include: fever, nausea, tiredness, discomfort in your abdomen, jaundice (yellow skin and eyes) and dark urine.

Most people with acute hepatitis B recover fully but it can take up to six months or even longer. A small number of people become very ill and may get liver failure or long-term liver problems. Some people do not feel unwell but can continue to carry the virus in their blood.

There is no specific treatment for acute hepatitis B. Your doctor will advise you to take plenty of rest, to eat healthily and to avoid alcohol.

What is chronic hepatitis B?

Some people who get hepatitis B continue to carry the virus in their blood even though they appear well. This is called chronic hepatitis B infection and people who have it may infect others.

You may feel healthy for your entire life and not show evidence of liver damage. Some people develop more severe liver disease, such as liver scarring (cirrhosis), liver failure or cancer.

Some people with chronic infection do not know they have hepatitis B and they may spread the virus to others without knowing.

How can I take care of my liver?

- Do not drink alcohol. Alcohol can damage your liver.
- If you have chronic hepatitis B infection your doctor should refer you to a specialist to check for liver disease and find out if medicines might help you. Hepatitis A vaccination will also be arranged for you if relevant.
- See your doctor regularly.
- Check with your doctor before taking any new medicines, over-the-counter medicines and herbal medicines.

How did I get hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is spread by contact with 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 person with chronic hepatitis B infection.

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

Can I spread hepatitis B to others?

People can get hepatitis B from you through contact with your blood, semen or vaginal fluids. It can also occasionally be spread by human bites. The virus can live outside the body for up to one week.

Your contacts, such as your partner, family or anyone who lives with you, should have a blood test to check if they have hepatitis B.

Is there a vaccine?

There is a safe and effective vaccine against hepatitis B. Your partner, family and anyone who lives with you can protect themselves with vaccination.

The vaccine is usually given in three doses by your family doctor - at the first visit, one month later and six months after the first injection. Occasionally doses are given more quickly. Some people may need additional doses of vaccine before they are protected. A very small number of people do not respond to the vaccine and are not protected. Hepatitis B vaccination is now offered routine to all children through the national immunisation programme.

How can I protect others if I have hepatitis B infection?

Here is what you need to do to protect others:

- Cover any cuts and open wounds with a band-aid or bandage.
- Wash your hands well after touching your blood or body fluids.
- Put tissues (and other products) soiled with blood or body fluids in a bag before you throw them in a bin.
- Clean up your blood spills. Then re-clean the area with bleach solution (one part household bleach to 10 parts water).
- Do not share toothbrushes, razors, needles, nail files, nail clippers, nail scissors, washcloths or towels.
- If you inject drugs, stop injecting or get into a rehab program. Never share drugs, needles, syringes, cotton, water or rinse cups.
- Do not donate blood, plasma, body organs, tissue or sperm.