

Bloodborne

facts

HEPATITIS B INFORMATION

WHAT IS HEPATITIS B?

Hepatitis B is a viral infection that infects the liver and causes inflammation. It is one of the fastest spreading sexually transmitted diseases in the U.S., infecting 300,000 Americans each year. Most individuals infected with the virus are adolescents and young adults.

Ninety percent of people with hepatitis B recover. In up to 10 percent of cases people infected with hepatitis B develop chronic hepatitis B and are infected for life. Chronic hepatitis can be fairly harmless, or it may be progressive and lead to cirrhosis, liver cancer, and death. Chances of developing liver cancer are 200 times higher if you are a chronic carrier. Damage to the liver cannot be reversed. People who are chronic carriers of the virus can transmit it to others.

There is no cure for Hepatitis B but a vaccine is available to prevent infection.

HOW DOES IT OCCUR?

Hepatitis B is very infectious. When the virus enters the bloodstream it begins to invade the liver cells, disrupting normal liver function. The disease can be spread through the use of contaminated syringes, needles, or unsterilized instruments including needles for steroid injections and body piercing. Hepatitis B can also be transmitted if you are exposed to infected blood through cuts, open sores, or mucous membranes (mouth or vagina) and through semen, vaginal secretions, and rarely saliva. The more partners with whom you have vaginal, anal, or oral intercourse, the higher your risk of becoming infected with hepatitis B.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Symptoms of hepatitis B may appear as long as 4 weeks to 6 months after infection with the virus. Many people develop a chronic or ongoing form of the disease with only vague symptoms even though liver damage may be occurring.

EARLY SYMPTOMS OF VIRAL HEPATITIS

Low-grade fever, itching hives, general achiness, fatigue, nausea, vomiting, and diarrhea, foul breath and bitter taste in the mouth, loss of appetite, altered sense of taste and smell, pain or tenderness just below the ribs on the right side, especially when pressure is applied.

Symptoms that may follow several days later include:

Darkened urine, light colored or gray stool, yellowish skin and eyes (jaundice).

HOW IS IT DIAGNOSED?

In addition to a brief physical examination the health care provider may use blood and urine tests. A biopsy may be necessary to diagnose chronic hepatitis.

HOW IS IT TREATED?

There is no cure for hepatitis B. Rest and a high protein diet is usually recommended to help repair damaged cells and a high carbohydrate diet to protect the liver. Your health care provider will manage symptoms as they occur.

HOW LONG WILL THE EFFECTS LAST?

Symptoms generally last 1 to 8 weeks and are usually followed by a slow but complete recovery. It may take 6 months before the liver functions normally again.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PREVENT THE SPREAD OF HEPATITIS B?

Hepatitis B is highly contagious for 4 to 6 weeks before symptoms appear and continues to be contagious for a short time afterward.

PREVENTION OF TRANSMISSION

Careful cleanliness and personal hygiene are important for the individual with hepatitis, including: cleaning any blood stains with a disinfectant, avoid sharing needles, razor blades, and toothbrushes, no blood donations, informing sexual partners of infection, use of a condom for anal, vaginal, or oral intercourse, and bandaging all cuts and open sores. Hepatitis B vaccination is recommended for anyone who may be exposed to the blood or body fluids of an infected individual.