



HEPATITIS B INFORMATION

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a liver infection caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). It can range in severity from a mild illness, lasting for a few weeks (acute), to a serious long-term (chronic) illness that can lead to liver disease or liver cancer.

How does a person get hepatitis B?

The virus that causes hepatitis B is spread through contact with infected blood, semen, or other body fluids of people who have hepatitis B. For example, you can get hepatitis B by having unprotected sex with an infected person, sharing needles or being stuck by a contaminated needle that was used by or on a person with the virus, or from an infected mother that passes it on to her newborn baby.

Hepatitis B cannot be transmitted through casual contact like shaking hands or hugging someone who is infected.

(Continued)

What are the symptoms of acute hepatitis B?

The symptoms of hepatitis B may range from mild to severe. If you have a mild case of hepatitis, you may not have any symptoms or your symptoms might just be similar to the stomach flu. Symptoms can include:

- nausea
- vomiting
- loss of appetite
- abdominal pain
- jaundice (the skin turns yellow or has a yellowish tint)
- weakness
- fatigue
- brown urine (may look like tea).

Acute hepatitis is when a person is having symptoms for the first time and the indications of the disease last for 6 weeks or less. Most people recover without having any long-lasting problems. On the other hand, hepatitis B can become an illness that lasts 6 months or longer. In this situation, it becomes referred to as chronic hepatitis B, which results when the liver has been damaged from the acute illness and can't recover. The time between the acute illness and signs of chronic hepatitis B varies and may range from a very short time to years.

What are the complications of chronic hepatitis B?

Some people with chronic hepatitis B may be symptom-free, while others end up with cirrhosis of the liver as a result. Cirrhosis occurs when liver cells die and are replaced by scar tissue and fat. These damaged areas of the liver stop functioning to cleanse the body of

wastes. Symptoms that arise and worsen as more of the liver is damaged include:

- weight loss
- fatigue
- jaundice
- nausea
- vomiting
- loss of appetite.

Cirrhosis can lead to liver failure and even liver cancer.

If you have hepatitis B, you are also more susceptible to hepatitis D, which only develops in people who already have hepatitis B.

How is hepatitis B diagnosed?

Blood tests that tell about your liver function are used to diagnose hepatitis B. Other diagnostic test might include an ultrasound, x-ray, or liver biopsy.

How is chronic hepatitis B treated?

Your physician may refer you to a gastroenterologist or other specialist that treats people with chronic liver problems. Medical treatments that are available include interferon alfa-2b and other antiviral medications.

Can hepatitis B be prevented?

The best way to prevent hepatitis B is to have protected sex (use a condom) and to avoid sharing needles.

There is also a safe and effective vaccine to prevent hepatitis B. The vaccine is a series of 3 injections given over a six-month period that will

provide lifetime protection. You cannot get hepatitis B from the vaccination since there is no human blood or living virus in the vaccine.

People who are at high risk for hepatitis B and should discuss the need for the vaccination with their health care provider include:

Individuals who

- are under 19 years of age
- have a sex partner that has hepatitis B
- are males with male sex partners
- recently had a sexually transmitted disease
- have more than one sexual partner
- shoot drugs
- live with someone who has chronic hepatitis B
- have a job that exposes them to human blood or other potentially infectious materials
- are receiving kidney dialysis
- live or travel for more than 6 months in countries where hepatitis B is common.

Sources:

<http://www.cdc.gov>

<http://familydoctor.org>

TRANSFORMING LIVES. TRANSFORMING KENTUCKY.

Revised 08/19/10