

When Someone Close To You Has Chronic Hepatitis B



Who should be tested for Hepatitis B?

Anyone who lives with or is close to someone who has been diagnosed with chronic Hepatitis B should get tested. Hepatitis B can be a serious illness, and the virus can be spread from an infected person to other family and household members, caregivers, and sexual partners.

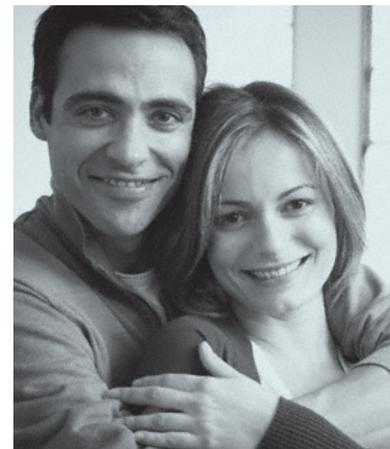
What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a contagious liver disease that results from infection with the Hepatitis B virus. Hepatitis B can be “acute” or “chronic.” Acute hepatitis ranges in severity from a mild to severe illness that occurs within the first 6 months of exposure to the Hepatitis B virus. Some people recover from their acute infection. When this happens, a person is immune, which means he or she cannot get Hepatitis B again and cannot spread the virus to others.

For other people, acute infection develops into a lifelong, or chronic, infection. When this happens, the virus remains in a person’s body, often without their knowledge, and it can easily be passed to other people.

How likely is Hepatitis B to become a chronic infection?

It depends on the age at which a person is infected with the Hepatitis B virus. Infants infected at birth have a 90% chance of developing chronic infection—unless they are vaccinated at birth. In contrast, the majority of people who are infected as adults recover from the acute illness. When this happens, they become immune to the Hepatitis B virus.



How serious is chronic Hepatitis B?

Over time, approximately 15%–25% of people with chronic Hepatitis B develop serious liver problems, including liver damage, cirrhosis, liver failure, and even liver cancer.

Every year, approximately 3,000 people in the United States and more than 600,000 people worldwide die from Hepatitis B-related liver disease.

How is it spread?

Hepatitis B is usually spread when blood, semen, or other body fluids from a person with the Hepatitis B virus enter the body of someone who is not infected. The virus is very infectious and is transmitted easily through breaks in the skin or mucus membranes (nose, mouth, eyes and other soft tissues). This can happen through:

- Sexual contact with an infected person
- Direct contact with infected or contaminated blood, even in tiny amounts too small to see
- Sharing personal items, such as toothbrushes, razors, syringes, or glucose monitors that have even microscopic amounts of blood on them
- Direct contact with open sores of an infected person
- An infected mother passing it to her baby at birth

Hepatitis B is not spread through sneezing, coughing, hugging, or breastfeeding. Although the virus can be found in saliva, it is not believed to be spread through kissing or sharing utensils.



Can Hepatitis B be prevented?

Yes. The best way to prevent Hepatitis B is by getting vaccinated. The vaccine is usually given as a series of 3 shots over a period of 6 months. The entire series is needed for long-term protection.

Who should be vaccinated against Hepatitis B?

In the United States, all infants should begin the Hepatitis B vaccine series at birth. In addition, the vaccine is recommended for anyone who has never been infected and is at risk for getting Hepatitis B. This could include family members, caregivers, sexual partners, and others close to someone who has Hepatitis B.

Is Hepatitis B vaccination recommended for all infants?

Yes. Vaccination is recommended for all newborns at birth. Vaccinating newborns can prevent them from getting the infection during birth or early childhood.

Is it possible to have been vaccinated against Hepatitis B but still be infected?

Yes. Vaccination of children began in 1991 and many people got the shots as children or adolescents. As a result, if someone was vaccinated as a child and not as a newborn, it is possible that he or she got Hepatitis B from a family member before getting vaccinated. In this instance, a doctor will want to conduct a blood test to determine if they unknowingly became infected with Hepatitis B before vaccination.

Is Hepatitis B common?

Yes. Hepatitis B is very common worldwide, especially in Asia and Africa. Most people with Hepatitis B were infected with the virus at birth or during early childhood. Many of those infected are unaware that they have chronic Hepatitis B, especially since they have no symptoms. As a result, they can spread the disease to others, including people they live with, sexual partners, and—for women—their newborns.

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis B?

Many people with Hepatitis B have no symptoms and do not know they are infected. If symptoms occur with acute infection, they usually appear within 3 months of exposure and can last anywhere from 2–12 weeks. Symptoms of chronic Hepatitis B can take up to 30 years to develop. Damage to the liver can silently occur during this time. When symptoms do appear, they often are a sign of advanced liver disease. Symptoms for both acute and chronic Hepatitis B can include fever, fatigue, abdominal pain, and jaundice.

Whether or not a person has symptoms, a blood test is the only way to know if a person had or has Hepatitis B.

Are there tests for Hepatitis B?

Yes. There are specific blood tests for Hepatitis B that are not part of blood work typically done during regular physical exams. The tests help a doctor determine if a person has never been infected, has been infected and recovered, or is currently infected.

Why is it important to get tested for Hepatitis B?

Testing sexual partners and household members of people with Hepatitis B helps determine what is needed to ensure their health. If a person has never gotten Hepatitis B, then the vaccine will protect them against the disease. However, if a person has been infected and recovered, they are immune to Hepatitis B and do not need the vaccine. For anyone who has chronic Hepatitis B, testing helps identify the disease early so they can benefit from medical care.

How is Hepatitis B treated?

People with Hepatitis B should see a doctor experienced in treating the disease. This doctor can determine the most appropriate medical care. People should be monitored on a regular basis, and some will benefit from medication. Several new medications are available which can delay or reverse the effects of liver disease.

For more information

Talk to your health professional, call your health department, or visit www.cdc.gov/hepatitis.



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Division of Viral Hepatitis

