

# Fact Sheet

## Hepatitis B

### What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a liver disease from infection with the hepatitis B virus (HBV). Most infected adults will have an acute (short-term) HBV infection and the body will fight off the virus its own. A small number of adults will develop a chronic (lifelong) HBV infection that can cause serious health problems over time.

### What are the symptoms of Hepatitis B?

Acute HBV: Not everyone will develop symptoms. Symptoms can include: fever, not wanting to eat, stomach discomfort, dark urine, grey-coloured stool, nausea, throwing up, joint pain and jaundice (yellow skin and eyes).

Chronic HBV: Many people do not have symptoms. Symptoms can take up to 30 years to develop and are similar to acute infection and can be a sign of liver disease.

### How is it spread?

HBV is spread through blood, semen, or other body fluids from a person infected with HBV, even if there are no symptoms of sickness. Possible ways of spreading the virus include:

- Sexual contact with an infected person
- Sharing needles, syringes or other drug use equipment
- An injury from a needle stick used by someone with HBV infection
- Sharing personal items which could have blood on them such as toothbrushes, dental floss, razors, nail files
- Sharing or use of unclean tattooing, piercing, acupuncture or electrolysis equipment
- From a mother to her baby at the time of birth

HBV infection is not known to be spread by casual contact including coughing, sneezing, hugging or kissing, touching or shaking hands, using the same dishes or cutlery as an infected person. Breastfeeding is not a risk for HBV, but if nipples are cracked or bleeding consider stopping breastfeeding until they have healed as HBV can be spread through blood.

### How do you know you have Hepatitis B?

A blood test is used to diagnose HBV.

### What is the treatment?

People who are infected with HBV should see their healthcare provider regularly and have regular blood testing to check liver function. Some people may be eligible for treatment.

### How can Hepatitis B be prevented?

To reduce the risk of getting HBV:

- Get vaccinated. The vaccine is safe and provides long-term protection
- Do not share needles or other equipment used to inject drugs
- Do not share personal items that may have come into contact with an infected person's blood, such as razors, nail clippers or toothbrushes
- Do not get tattoos or piercings from unlicensed facilities or in an informal setting
- Use safer sex practices