



SEXUAL HEALTH TESTING

# Hepatitis B Information Sheet

## What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis refers to inflammation and damage to the liver. The most common causes of hepatitis are three viruses known as hepatitis A, B, and C. The hepatitis B virus (HBV) is a major global health problem that can cause both acute (short-term) and chronic (long-term) disease (1).

## Symptoms of Hepatitis B

### Acute Infection

Many people with acute hepatitis B infection remain asymptomatic and are unaware they are infected, but can still pass the virus to others (2). Possible symptoms that can appear 30-180 days post-exposure include:

- Yellowing of the skin or eyes
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Fatigue

### Chronic Infection

In some individuals, hepatitis B can develop into a chronic infection. There is an 80-90% chance of chronic infection occurring in infants infected within their first year of life, and a 30-50% chance for children infected before the age of six years. The chance of a chronic infection in adults is much lower, as less than 5% of infected adults develop chronic infections, assuming there are no other health complications (1).

Chronic hepatitis B can develop into cirrhosis or liver cancer. Cirrhosis signs can include fatigue, weakness, lower leg swelling, yellow skin, fluid accumulation in the abdomen, and the development of spider-like blood vessels on the skin (3). Liver cancer shares many of the same symptoms, as well as feeling nauseous, symptoms of indigestion, and pain at the top right of the abdomen or in the right shoulder (referred pain).

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## Who is at increased risk of Hepatitis B?

- Injectable drug users
- Individuals who require blood or blood products
- Dialysis patients
- Health care personnel who may be exposed to contaminated blood
- Children born to HBV-positive mothers
- Individuals with multiple sex partners
- Recipients of solid organ transplantations

## How is Hepatitis B diagnosed?

Hepatitis B diagnosis is by laboratory analyses of a blood sample. Active infections are usually diagnosed by detection of the hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg). A reactive result indicates a current hepatitis B infection. Additional testing is required to distinguish between acute and chronic infections, and to determine the extent of any liver damage.

## How is Hepatitis B managed?

- Safe and effective vaccination
- Antiviral prophylaxis to prevent transmission from mother to child
- Adequate nutritional and fluid intake
- Safe injection practices
- Screening of all donated blood and blood products
- Oral treatments to suppress hepatitis B virus
- Avoid sharing items that may come into contact with blood
- Cover any cuts or sores to reduce the risk of transmission

## How do I reduce my risk?

- Don't share needles
- Be in a long-term mutually monogamous relationship
- Use condoms correctly
- Avoid unregulated tattoos or body piercings
- Don't share personal items that may have been in contact with infected blood (e.g. glucose monitors, razors)

### References:

- (1) Hepatitis B, World Health Organization. July 2020.
- (2) Krugman S, et al. (1979) Viral hepatitis, type B. Studies on natural history and prevention re-examined. N Engl J Med. 300 (3), 101-6.
- (3) Cirrhosis. National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. April 2014.

### Where can I find more info?

Visit [www.genetrackdiagnostics.com](http://www.genetrackdiagnostics.com) for full test information, including specimen collection requirements

#### CONTACT US:

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