



Hepatitis B

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. It can be caused by viruses such as hepatitis A, B, C, D, E and G, alcohol, some chemicals, or drugs.

Hepatitis B is caused by a virus. It is sometimes called 'Hep B'.

It is a different virus to hepatitis A and hepatitis C.

If you have hepatitis B, your baby can be infected during birth or soon after.

Most adults recover completely from hepatitis B, and can't catch it again.

However, some adults and children, and most babies infected with hepatitis B, will go on to develop a chronic (or lifelong) infection. People with chronic hepatitis B often don't feel sick but will have the virus in their blood for years. People with chronic hepatitis B can develop serious liver diseases, including liver failure and liver cancer, 20 or more years after first getting hepatitis B. People with chronic hepatitis B can also infect other people, even if they feel well and don't have any symptoms.

If you share a house with a person with chronic hepatitis B, you need to be especially careful.

In Australia, you are very unlikely to get hepatitis B through blood transfusion or an organ transplant.

How do you get hepatitis B?

The hepatitis B virus is mainly spread through direct contact with infected blood and blood products, but you can also be infected through other body fluids including

semen and vaginal fluids.

You can catch hepatitis B:

- from a tiny amount of blood, too small to see
- by having vaginal, oral or anal sex with an infected person if you don't use a condom or dam (a thin latex square held over the vaginal or anal area during oral sex)
- from sharing needles, syringes and other drug injecting equipment with an infected person
- if you have a job that involves possible contact with human blood or body fluids.

Signs and symptoms

About half of all adults and most children with hepatitis B have no symptoms at all. Some people feel well for several months before having any symptoms.

Symptoms include:

- fever
- extreme tiredness for weeks or months
- loss of appetite
- nausea (feeling sick) and vomiting
- joint pains
- eyes or skin turning yellow (jaundice).

How do I know I have hepatitis B?

A blood test can show you have been infected with hepatitis B in the past, and whether you are chronically infected. Other tests, such as liver function test, can show if any damage has been done to the liver.

See your doctor as soon as possible if you think you may have hepatitis B.



Treatment of hepatitis B

If you are exposed to hepatitis B, you should see your doctor immediately to assess the need for testing and vaccination.

There is treatment available for chronic hepatitis B that can reduce the progress of liver damage and loss of liver function. People with chronic hepatitis B should be monitored regularly (every 6-12 months) by their GP for signs and symptoms of liver disease.

If you have the infection

- Do not donate blood, organs or tissue.
- Tell your doctor and dentist that you are infected.
- Be very careful to make sure that other people are not exposed to your blood or body fluids.
- Cover your wounds with a waterproof bandage.
- Use condoms, water-based lubricant and dams with new sexual partners, and with partners who are not already immune.
- Never share needles, syringes or any drug injecting equipment. Make sure injecting equipment is new and/or sterile.

How can hepatitis B be prevented?

You can reduce the risks of getting hepatitis B by following this advice:

- Never share needles, syringes or any drug injecting equipment. Make sure injecting equipment is new and/or sterile.
- Practise safe sex – use a condom or dam, and water-based lubricant. The risk increases if you have many partners, anal sex and/or sex during a woman's period.

- Before considering any body art (such as tattooing or piercing) make sure the body artist uses only sterilised equipment, and new razors, inks and needles each time.
- Don't share personal hygiene items such as razors, toothbrushes and dental floss.
- Clean and cover any bleeding cuts and grazes immediately.
- All blood spills – including those that have already dried – should be cleaned and disinfected with a mixture of bleach and water (one part household bleach to 10 parts water). Always wear gloves when cleaning up any blood spills, and use disposable paper towels. Even dried blood can present a risk to others. Wrap the towels and gloves in a plastic bag before putting them in the bin.

Is there a vaccine for hepatitis B?

Yes, hepatitis B vaccination is safe and effective. You will be almost 100 per cent safe if you are fully vaccinated against hepatitis B. There are 3 injections over 6 months for adults.

Every baby born in Australia and every child in Year 8 can get free hepatitis B vaccines. Vaccination is also free to some high-risk groups – ask your doctor.

Who should get vaccinated?

Sexual partners and people living with a person with chronic hepatitis B should be tested for the virus. If they are not infected, they should be vaccinated.

Hepatitis B vaccination is recommended if:

- you ever take part in injecting drug use, tattooing or body piercing
- you have unprotected vaginal, oral or anal sex with casual partners, or are a sex worker



- you are a man who has sex with men
- you have chronic liver disease other than hepatitis B
- you are on dialysis
- your work brings you into contact with blood or other body fluids
- you are an inmate or staff of a prison
- you live or work with people with intellectual disabilities
- you travel to countries where hepatitis B is common
- you are a member of a family who has adopted children from overseas
- you are a healthcare worker.

Translated information about hepatitis B

Arabic
عربي

[Arabic – hepatitis B \(PDF 188KB\)](#)

[Burmese – hepatitis B \(PDF 128KB\)](#)

[Chinese – hepatitis B \(PDF 308KB\)](#)

[French – hepatitis B \(PDF 99KB\)](#)

Indonesian
Bahasa Indonesia

[Indonesian – hepatitis B \(PDF 229KB\)](#)

Thai
ไทย

[Thai – hepatitis B \(PDF 189KB\)](#)

Vietnamese
Việt ngữ

[Vietnamese – hepatitis B \(PDF 243KB\)](#)

Where to get help

- See your doctor.
- Call Hepatitis WA Helpline (9328 8538 for metropolitan callers or 1800 800 070 for country callers).

- Call the Sexual Health Helpline (9227 6178 for metropolitan callers or 1800 198 205 for country callers).
- Ring *healthdirect Australia* on 1800 022 222.
- Call the Central Immunisation Clinic on 9321 1312.
- Contact your local Population Health Unit, community nurse or health worker.

Remember

- Hepatitis B is a disease of the liver.
- It is spread by a virus.
- Hepatitis B is a different virus to hepatitis A or hepatitis C.
- A vaccination against hepatitis B is available.

Acknowledgements
Public Health

See also

- [Childhood immunisation schedule](#)

Related sites

- [Hepatitis WA website \(external site\)](#)
- [Hepatitis Australia website \(external site\)](#)
- [Healthdirect Australia \(external site\)](#)



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