

Hepatitis B

Finding Out Your Status



What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a serious liver disease caused by a virus. This virus can enter the bloodstream and attack the liver. Hepatitis B is more common in people who live in, or were born in, certain areas of the world (see the list on the back of this flier). If someone you know is infected with the hepatitis B virus, he or she has an increased risk of developing liver failure or liver cancer.

How do you know if you have hepatitis B?

It is important to know if you are infected with the hepatitis B virus. Millions of people around the world are infected with this virus. Many people have no symptoms, but severe liver disease may occur after several years of silent infection. The only way to know your hepatitis B status is to have your blood tested. These blood tests will tell you that your hepatitis B status is one of the following:

Susceptible: If you are susceptible to hepatitis B, this means you have never had the disease and were never vaccinated. You could get infected in the future. If you are susceptible, you should be vaccinated to protect yourself against hepatitis B. If you are susceptible to hepatitis B, a series of vaccinations will protect you.

Immune: If you are immune to the hepatitis B virus, you had it in the past or you were previously vaccinated. You are safe from hepatitis B.

Chronically Infected: If you are chronically infected with hepatitis B, you carry the virus in your blood. You usually do not feel sick but you can pass the infection on to other people. You need to be under the care of a physician and checked regularly for the development of serious liver problems.

How do you get hepatitis B?

Lots of ways. The hepatitis B virus is passed by contact with infected blood or body fluids. Some of the more common ways of becoming infected with the hepatitis B virus include:

- passing the virus from mother to baby at birth
- having sex with an infected partner
- coming in contact with a person's blood
- sharing toothbrushes or razors
- pre-chewing food for babies
- biting
- using unsterilized needles for ear-piercing, injecting drugs, acupuncture or tattooing
- living with someone who has a chronic hepatitis B virus infection

Hepatitis B is not spread by sneezing, coughing or holding hands.



If you, your parents or your children were born in any of these places ...

Afghanistan, Africa, rural Alaska, Albania, Bangladesh, Bosnia and Hercegovina, Bulgaria, Cambodia, China, Eastern Europe, Haiti, Hawaii, India, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Korea, Laos, Malaysia, the Middle East, Myanmar, Pakistan, the Pacific Islands, the Philippines, Romania, the former Soviet Union, South America's Amazon Basin, Sri Lanka, Syria, Taiwan, Thailand or Vietnam

... give this flier to your doctor and ask to find out your hepatitis B status.

Is there a cure for hepatitis B?

There is no "cure" for hepatitis B. If a person has hepatitis B-related liver disease, certain medications can help. At times, these medications can cause side effects. Medications are only used when a person's liver tests show abnormalities. The majority of people who are chronically infected with hepatitis B do not need medication and will lead normal, healthy lives.

If you are chronically infected with the hepatitis B virus, you should consult your doctor. People who are chronically infected with hepatitis B should avoid alcohol and make sure all their household members and partners are tested for hepatitis B, and if found susceptible, vaccinated.

Researchers continue to look for more treatments and cures for people infected with the hepatitis B virus.

Where can I go for hepatitis B testing and vaccination?

For more information about hepatitis B, contact your doctor or nurse, call CDC's Information Line at 1-800-232-2522, or visit the Immunization Action Coalition (IAC) Web site at www.immunize.org*.

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This flier has been adapted from the Immunization Action Coalition (IAC), and its technical content was reviewed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Immunization Action Coalition, 1573 Selby Avenue, Suite 234, St. Paul, MN 55104, (651) 647-9009, www.immunize.org, www.vaccineinformation.org.

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