

Hepatitis B

A GUIDE FOR PATIENTS

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a liver disease caused by infection with a virus. In adults, less than five per cent of new infections will go on to long-lasting (chronic) liver disease. Treatment of chronic disease can lessen damage to the liver.

How is hepatitis B spread?

- Having sex with an infected person
- Contact with the blood of an infected person
- Injection drug use. If using drugs, do not share or re-use needles.
- To a baby during delivery by an infected woman
- Transfusion of blood products (rare). Inform your doctor if you have ever received blood or are a donor

What will help me get better?

- Don't use alcohol – it accelerates liver damage in patients with hepatitis B
- Eat well to help your liver heal
- Get vaccinated for hepatitis A if you have no prior infection or immunity
- The value of herbal remedies remains unknown

How can I protect others from getting infected?

- Don't let others come in contact with your blood, e.g. a bloody nose or cut
- Don't share needles or other equipment for intravenous drug use, tattooing or body piercing
- Don't share spoons or straws for intranasal cocaine use
- Don't share anything that might have blood on it, like a razor or toothbrush
- Ask your sexual partner(s) to be tested for hepatitis B immunity (you have a high risk of spreading the virus to them)
- Ask your sexual partner(s) to get vaccinated, if they are not immune to hepatitis B
- Tell your other health care providers, e.g. dentist or laboratory technician that you are infected with hepatitis B
- Use condoms 100 per cent of the time, unless your partner is immune

You cannot spread hepatitis B by:

- Coughing, kissing or hugging
- Sharing eating utensils or drinking glasses

If you are a mother carrying hepatitis B:

- Be sure that your baby is vaccinated at birth, at one month, and at six months.
- Breastfeeding is safe for babies who have been vaccinated and who have received hepatitis B immune globulin (HBIG) at birth

For updated information:

- Visit the Guidelines and Protocols Web site:
www.healthservices.gov.bc.ca/msp/protoguides/gps/index.html#H. Look for Hepatitis.
- Visit the BC Centre for Disease Control Web site: www.bccdc.org/topic.php?item=59