

## Hepatitis B

### What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a serious liver disease caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). In the United States over 12 million people have been infected (that's 1 out of 20 people). It is estimated that each year 80,000 people are infected with HBV. Today, approximately 1.25 million people in the U.S. are chronically infected and 5,000 people die each year.

### What are the symptoms of hepatitis B infection?

Symptoms of acute hepatitis B can include jaundice (yellowing of the skin), fatigue, abdominal pain, dark urine, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, and joint pain. It is important to remember, however, that up to 30% of people who are infected with hepatitis B do not exhibit any symptoms and may not know they have it. If symptoms occur, they occur on the average of 12 weeks after exposure to hepatitis B virus. Symptoms are more likely to occur in adults than in children.

### How is hepatitis B spread?

HBV is spread through contact with the blood and body fluids of an infected person. There are several ways a person has increased risk of becoming infected, including:

- Sharing needles or "works" when using illegal injecting and intranasal drugs
- Being born to an infected mother
- Sexual contact with someone who is HBV positive
- Needlestick (i.e., tattooing, ear piercing)
- Needlestick or sharps exposure on the job

### Who should be tested for hepatitis B?

Certain groups of people who are more susceptible to HBV infection should be tested, including:

- Anyone who has ever injected illegal drugs
- People with signs or symptoms of liver disease
- Health care workers who have been potentially exposed
- Children born to HBV-positive mothers
- Household contacts of persons who are HBV positive

### How is hepatitis B diagnosed?

There are several blood tests that can be done to determine if you have been infected with hepatitis B. Your health care provider may order just one or a combination of these tests.

### Is there a vaccine for hepatitis B?

Yes, there is a hepatitis B vaccine; it consists of a 3 dose series. It is recommended that all children receive the HBV vaccine, with the first dose given at birth (if the birth dose is not possible the first dose should be given at 4- 6 weeks of age.) All three doses must be given for protection from HBV. Adolescents should receive the three dose series if they have not previously been immunized. Adults over 18 who are at risk should also be vaccinated. Adults are at risk if they have had more than one sex partner during a six month period; have been evaluated for a sexually transmitted disease; are health care personnel, or are otherwise exposed to infected blood or

body fluids; are men who have sex with other men; or use intranasal and injection drugs.

**Is there a treatment for hepatitis B infection?**

There are no medications available for recently acquired (acute) HBV infection. There are antiviral drugs available for the treatment of chronic HBV infection.

People with HBV infection should avoid alcohol, and certain medications. Follow recommendations given by your health care provider. If you are chronically infected, you should consult your healthcare provider at least yearly for a physical exam and blood tests to monitor liver function.

**What precautions can I take to prevent exposure to HBV?**

Do not share intranasal or injectable illegal drug “works”, do not share personal items (ex. razor, toothbrush) with an infected person, and use a latex condom to decrease the risk of catching or passing HBV through sexual contact.

**For specific concerns regarding hepatitis B, call the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Communicable Disease Control Section at 603-271-4496 or 800-852-3345 x4496. For further information, refer to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) or the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services website: [www.dhhs.nh.gov](http://www.dhhs.nh.gov).**