



through their blood and infected bodily fluids. For those who become chronically infected, there is an increased risk of developing serious liver disease later in life. The virus can quietly and continuously attack the liver over many years without being detected.

What is acute hepatitis B?

A hepatitis B infection is considered to be "acute" from the time of exposure until 6 months afterward. This is the typical amount of time it takes for a healthy adult to successfully clear a hepatitis B infection and develop the protective antibodies. During an acute infection, a person is contagious and able to pass the virus on to others.

90% of healthy adults are able to "recover" by getting rid of the virus, which is confirmed by a blood test. Once a person has recovered, they are no longer contagious and are immune to future hepatitis B infections.

What is chronic hepatitis B?

A person is diagnosed with chronic hepatitis B if they test positive for the hepatitis B virus for longer than 6 months. A chronic hepatitis B infection may stay with the person for a lifetime. About 10% of adults who contract hepatitis B will develop chronic hepatitis B.

Is there a cure for hepatitis B?

For an "acute" infection, there is generally no treatment other than rest and supportive measures to manage any symptoms. For "chronic" hepatitis B, there are 3 approved drugs in the US: Intron A, Epivir-HBV, and Hepsera. These drugs slow down the virus and reduce potential liver damage. In rare cases, they may even get rid of the virus completely. For a complete list of other promising drugs in development for hepatitis B, visit our [Drug Watch](#).

Prevention and Vaccination

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Can I catch hepatitis B from the vaccine?

If I started the vaccine series but didn't complete my 2nd or 3rd dose on schedule, do I have to start the series over?

What else can I do to protect myself from hepatitis B?

How can I get hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is an infectious disease caused by a virus that is spread through blood. Listed below are the most common ways hepatitis B is passed to others:

- Direct contact with blood or infected bodily fluids
- Unprotected sex with an infected partner
- Shared or re-used needles (for example, sharing needles for illegal drugs or re-using needles that are not properly sterilized for acupuncture, tattoos, or ear/body piercing)
- From an infected mother to her newborn baby during delivery

Is hepatitis B transmitted casually?

No, hepatitis B is not spread through casual contact. You cannot get hepatitis B from the air, hugging, touching, sneezing, coughing, toilet seats or doorknobs. You cannot get hepatitis B from eating or drinking with someone who is infected nor from eating food prepared by someone who has hepatitis B.

Who is most likely to become infected with hepatitis B?

- Sexually active adults and teenagers
- Men who have sex with men
- Infants born to infected mothers
- Healthcare workers and providers
- Emergency Personnel
- Recipients of blood transfusions before 1992
- Injection drug users, past and present
- People who get tattoos or body piercing
- Family or household members living in close contact with an infected person
- Immigrants from and travelers to high-risk areas
- Families adopting children from countries where hepatitis B is common (Asia, Eastern Europe, South American and Africa)



What should I do if I am in one of the “high risk groups” for contracting hepatitis B?

Anyone who is in a “high risk” group should receive the hepatitis B vaccine. Adults can obtain the vaccine by asking their doctor or a local health clinic. In the United States, doctors recommend that all newborns and children up to age 18 years be vaccinated. Babies, children and teens can receive free hepatitis B vaccine from most state health departments.

Is the hepatitis B vaccine safe?

Yes, the hepatitis B vaccine is very safe and effective. In fact, it is the first “anti-cancer vaccine” because it can protect you from hepatitis B, which is the cause of 80% of all liver cancer in the world. It only takes 3 shots to protect yourself and those you love against hepatitis B for a lifetime.

With more than one billion doses given throughout the world, medical and scientific studies have shown the hepatitis B vaccine to be one of the safest vaccines ever made.

Can I get hepatitis B from the vaccine?

No. You cannot get hepatitis B from the vaccine because it does not contain any live virus. The vaccine is made from a synthetic yeast product in a laboratory. The most common side effects are redness and soreness in the arm where the shot is given.

If I started the vaccine series but didn't complete my 2nd or 3rd dose on schedule, do I have to start the series over?

No, there is no need to restart the series. You should resume vaccination from the point that the series was interrupted.

What else can I do to protect myself from hepatitis B?

Since hepatitis B is spread through blood and infected body fluids, there are several simple things that you can do to protect yourself from possible infection:

- Avoid sharing sharp objects such as razors, toothbrushes, earrings, and nail clippers
- Make sure that sterile needles are used for acupuncture, tattoos, ear and body piercing
- Avoid touching blood or any bodily fluids directly



- Wear gloves and use a fresh solution of bleach and water to clean up blood spills
- Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and water after touching or cleaning up blood
- Use condoms with sexual partners
- Avoid illegal drugs and prescription drug misuse, including injection of such drugs
- Most importantly, make sure you receive the hepatitis B vaccine!

Hepatitis B Blood Tests

Is there a blood test for hepatitis B?

What three tests make up the "hepatitis B blood panel"?

What is the hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg)?

What is the hepatitis B surface antibody (HBsAb)?

What is the hepatitis B core antibody (HBcAb)?

I donated blood and received a letter from the blood bank, what does it mean?

Is there a blood test for hepatitis B?

There is a simple hepatitis B blood test that your doctor or health clinic can order called the "hepatitis B blood panel". This blood sample can be taken in the doctor's office. There are 3 common tests that make up this blood panel. Sometimes the doctor may ask to check your blood again six months after your first visit to confirm your hepatitis B status. If you think you have been recently infected with hepatitis B, it will take 4 -6 weeks before the virus will be detected in your blood.

Understanding your hepatitis B blood test results can be confusing, so you want to be clear about your diagnosis - do you have a new infection, have you recovered from a past infection, or do you have a chronic infection? In addition, it is helpful if you request a written copy of your blood tests so that you fully understand which tests are positive or negative.