

If you speak English, please contact the Hepatitis B Foundation by email at [info@hepb.org](mailto:info@hepb.org) or call us at 215-489-4900.

## UNDERSTANDING HEPATITIS B BLOOD TESTS

### **Why should I be tested for hepatitis B?**

If you are Vietnamese or of Asian descent, then you should be tested because you are at higher risk for having hepatitis B. It is a very simple blood test. The test can be done quickly in the doctor's office. Even if you feel well, there is a risk that you could be infected and not know it. You could unknowingly pass the virus on to others who are in close personal contact with you. If you have chronic hepatitis B, then you are also at higher risk for developing liver cancer later in life. Getting tested now can lead to early diagnosis and management, which could help save your life in the future.

### **Why do I need to know whether I have hepatitis B or not?**

Because knowing your hepatitis B status will help you make good decisions about your health.

- If blood tests show that you have not been infected with hepatitis B, then you should protect yourself by getting the hepatitis B vaccine.
- If blood tests show that you have recovered from an infection, then you don't need the hepatitis B vaccine because you are already protected.
- If blood tests show that you have a chronic hepatitis B infection, then you should find a good doctor for regular medical care, avoid spreading the virus to others, and make sure your loved ones are tested and vaccinated.

### **What kind of blood tests will my doctor order?**

The hepatitis B blood test is very simple and requires only a quick visit to the doctor's office. There are 3 tests that are part of the '**hepatitis B blood test panel**':

1. **Hepatitis B surface Antigen (HBsAg)** - this tests directly for the presence of virus. If it is positive, then the hepatitis B virus is present in your blood. This test may have to be repeated in six months to confirm whether you have a chronic infection.
2. **Hepatitis B surface Antibody (HBsAb or anti-HBs)** - this tests for the "surface antibody" that is produced by your immune system to fight off the virus. It will be positive if you have "recovered" from a natural infection, but this can take up to six months. This "surface antibody" will protect you for life against any future hepatitis B infections. The test will also be positive if you have received the hepatitis B vaccine.
3. **Hepatitis B core Antibody (HBcAb or anti-HBc)** - this tests for a part of the virus called the "core antibody". This antibody does not protect you. If the test is positive, then you may have been infected with the hepatitis B virus. However, this test result can only be interpreted in relation to the above two tests.

**What should I ask my doctor?**

Make sure your doctor clearly explains the blood test results to you – all 3 blood test results are needed to make a complete diagnosis. Ask the doctor whether you have been infected with hepatitis B, whether you have a chronic infection, or whether you have never been infected. Be sure you ask for copies of your blood test results so that you can see what tests were positive or negative. Take a copy of the chart (see below) to your doctor to confirm your test results.

**UNDERSTANDING YOUR HEPATITIS B BLOOD TEST RESULTS**

<b>Tests</b>	<b>Results</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
HBsAg HBsAb (anti-HBs) HBcAb (anti-HBc)	negative negative negative	<b>Not immune</b> - has not been infected, but is still at risk for possible future infection. Needs protection.	<b>Get the vaccine.</b>
HBsAg HBsAb (anti-HBs) HBcAb (anti-HBc)	negative positive negative or positive	<b>Immune</b> - surface antibodies present. You may have been already vaccinated. Or you have recovered from a prior hepatitis B infection. You cannot infect others.	<b>The vaccine is not needed.</b>
HBsAg HBsAb (anti-HBs) HBcAb (anti-HBc)	positive negative negative or positive	<b>New infection or a Chronic Carrier</b> - positive surface antigen, which means hepatitis B virus is present. You can spread the virus to others.	<b>Find a knowledgeable doctor for further evaluation.</b>
HBsAg HBsAb (anti-HBs) HBcAb (anti-HBc)	negative negative positive	<b>*Unclear.</b> Several different interpretations are possible. You may need to have these tests repeated. See below.	<b>The vaccine may or may not be needed. Find a knowledgeable doctor for further evaluation.</b>

\*An unclear blood test result occurs when the HBcAb (hepatitis B core antibody) is the only positive blood test. There could be several reasons for this positive test result:

1. You may be recovering from a new hepatitis B infection.
2. You may be immune, but the surface antibodies levels in the blood are too low to be detected by this test.
3. This may be a false positive, which means the test has to be repeated.
4. You may be a chronic carrier, but the surface antigens (e.g. virus levels) in the blood are too low to be detected. There are additional blood tests that are more sensitive and can be ordered by your doctor.

**What do my blood test results mean?**

Take the hepatitis B blood test chart with you when you visit your doctor (see above). Ask your doctor to clearly explain what your test results mean. Make sure you know whether you have hepatitis B or not. Ask if you have recovered from an infection or whether you have become a chronic carrier of hepatitis B. Before you leave the office, make sure you get a copy of all your blood test results.

**Summary of common hepatitis B blood test results:**

- A positive hepatitis B "surface antigen" (HBsAg+) indicates the virus is present in your blood.
- A positive hepatitis B "surface antibody" (HbsAb+) indicates recovery from an infection or successful vaccination.
- A positive hepatitis B "core antibody" (HbcAb+) indicates that you may have been exposed to the hepatitis B virus. This result must be confirmed by the other two tests.

**Where can I get more information about testing and vaccination?**

You can ask your family doctor, the local health department, or community health clinic to order the simple hepatitis B blood test. You can also start the vaccine series at this time.

If you need help finding a doctor or want more information, please call the HBV Information and Assistance HelpLine at **1-888-888-0981**. This is a free telephone call, which is part of a national community program sponsored by GlaxoSmithKline. All information is available in Vietnamese, English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean.

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