

UNDERSTANDING HEPATITIS B BLOOD TESTS

Why should I get tested for hepatitis B?

If you are Chinese 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.

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

Because you want to make good health decisions. If the blood test shows that you have not been infected, then you should protect yourself through vaccination. If you have "recovered" from an infection, then you don't need the vaccine because you are already protected. If you have a chronic hepatitis B infection, then you should find a doctor for good 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 can be done quickly in the doctor's office. There are 3 common tests that are done with the one sample of blood taken from you:

1. **Hepatitis B surface Antigen (HBsAg)** - this tests directly for the presence of virus. If it is positive, then you may have a hepatitis B infection. This test may have to be repeated to confirm whether you have a chronic infection.
2. **Hepatitis B surface Antibody (HBsAb or anti-HBs)** - this tests for the "surface antibody" that your immune system makes to fight off the virus. It will be positive if you have "recovered", 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". It does not protect you. If this test is positive, then you may have been infected with the hepatitis B virus. But this test result can only be interpreted in relation to the above two tests.

What do the hepatitis B blood tests mean?

Make sure your doctor clearly tells you whether you have a positive hepatitis B "surface antibody", which means you have recovered from an infection. Or whether you have a positive hepatitis B "surface antigen", which means you may be infected with the virus. Remember that the hepatitis B "core antibody" only means that you may have been exposed to the hepatitis B virus. Your doctor should have all three test results in order to make a clear diagnosis.

A simple explanation of common test results is provided below. Take this chart to your doctor as a way of beginning a discussion about your test results. Remember, this chart is only a guideline. Your doctor must confirm your blood test results and your diagnosis. Be sure to ask for a written copy of your blood test results.

Where can I get more information about testing and hepatitis B?

You can ask your family doctor, the local health department, or a liver specialist to order the simple hepatitis B blood test. This blood test can be done in any doctor's office.

You can also call **1-888-888-0981**, which is the GlaxoSmithKline HBV Information and Assistance telephone helpline. This is a free phone call. Information about HBV and physician referrals across the country are available in English, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean, and Vietnamese.

Hepatitis B Blood Test Chart

Take this chart to your doctor. Ask your doctor to clearly explain what your test results mean. Before you leave the office, make sure you get a copy of all your blood test results.

Understanding Your Hepatitis B Blood Test Results

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

*Unclear Blood Test Result is when the HBcAb (hepatitis B core antibody) is the only positive 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.