

Hepatitis B

What Is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a viral infection of the liver that can cause both acute (brief and severe) and chronic (long-term or ongoing) disease. The liver clears toxins from the body. Hepatitis causes the liver to become inflamed which can lead to even more issues.

What Are the Signs and Symptoms of Hepatitis B?

Most people do not experience any symptoms during the acute infection phase. However, some people have acute illness with symptoms that last several weeks. Symptoms can include:

- Fever;
- Fatigue;
- Loss of appetite;
- Nausea/vomiting;
- Abdominal pain;
- Grey coloured stool;
- Dark urine;
- Joint pain; and
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and/or eyes).

In some people, the Hepatitis B virus can lead to a chronic liver infection that can develop into other liver diseases later in life.

How Is Hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B is usually spread when blood from a person infected with Hepatitis B virus enters the body of someone who is not infected. The most common way the virus is spread is from mother to child at birth, or from person to person in early childhood. Sexual contact with an infected person and the use of contaminated needles, especially among injection drug users, are also common routes of infection. Hepatitis B is not spread through breastfeeding, sharing eating utensils, hugging, kissing, holding hands, coughing or sneezing. Hepatitis B is not spread through contaminated food or water. There is a vaccination available to prevent getting Hepatitis B.

What Special Precautions Are Required for Hepatitis B? What Do I Need to Know?

Together we can take steps to stop the spread of Hepatitis B to other patients in the hospital:

- Everyone who enters or leaves your room will clean their hands;

- Gloves, gowns and/or masks will be worn by staff who might come into contact with your body fluids; and
- Your room and the equipment used in your room will be cleaned and disinfected regularly.

What Is Good Hand Cleaning?

Our staff welcomes reminders to clean our hands. We invite you to ask anyone who enters your room to clean their hands before and after they touch you. Ask any staff member to show you good hand cleaning (20 seconds of soap and running water OR waterless alcohol hand rub for 20 seconds until hands are dry). Please clean your hands often and ask for help to clean your hands if needed:

- After using the bathroom;
- After blowing your nose;
- Before eating and drinking;
- Before and after you touch your dressing or wounds;
- When your hands are visibly dirty; and
- Before you leave your room.

Who Is at Risk for Chronic Disease?

The chance of a person infected with the Hepatitis B virus to turn into a chronic infection depends upon the age that the person became infected. Children less than six years of age who become infected with the Hepatitis B virus are the most likely to develop a chronic infection later in life.

What Is the Treatment for Hepatitis B?

There is no specific treatment for acute Hepatitis B. Care for someone with an acute Hepatitis B infection is focused on comfort, good nutrition and preventing dehydration. More than 90% of healthy adults who are infected with the Hepatitis B virus will recover and will have got rid of the virus within six months. Some people with chronic Hepatitis B can be treated with medications. This treatment can slow the progression of the chronic disease.

Questions? Infection Prevention and Control department 519-464-4400 Ext. 5253.

References:

Center for Disease Control: CDC Hepatitis B (July 2020)

WHO (World Health Organization) Hep B (July 2020)