



Hepatitis B

Transmission

The Hep B virus found in the blood and body fluids (semen, vaginal fluid and saliva) of an infected person. Transmission can occur by:

- Direct blood to blood contact
- Sharing personal care articles such as razors, scissors, nail clippers or a toothbrush with an infected person
- Having unprotected sex
- Use of unsterile needles, sharing contaminated needles and other drug-using paraphernalia (e.g., straws, pipes, spoons and cookers)
- From an infected woman to her newborn during delivery
- The virus can also be transmitted in the workplace from exposure to an infected person's blood or body fluids.

Did You Know....the earliest record of an epidemic caused by hepatitis B virus was made by Lurman in 1885.

An outbreak of smallpox occurred in Bremen in 1883 and 1,289 shipyard employees were vaccinated with lymph from other people. After several weeks, and up to eight months later, 191 of the vaccinated workers became ill with jaundice and were diagnosed as suffering from serum hepatitis. Other employees who had been inoculated with different batches of lymph remained healthy. Lurman's paper, now regarded as a classical example of an epidemiological study, proved that contaminated lymph was the source of the outbreak.

Hepatitis B is NOT spread by:

- coughing, sneezing
- touching or shaking hands with an infected person; hugging, kissing or other casual contact
- breastfeeding (unless the nipples are cracked and bleeding. Breastfeeding can be resumed when the nipples are healed)
- using toilet seats
- Sharing eating utensils.

Signs and Symptoms

Most people do not experience any symptoms during the acute infection phase. However, some people have acute illness with symptoms that last several weeks, including yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice), dark urine, extreme fatigue, nausea, vomiting and abdominal pain.

In some people, the hepatitis B virus can also cause a chronic liver infection that can later develop into cirrhosis of the liver or liver cancer. More than 90% of healthy adults who are infected with the hepatitis B virus will recover and be completely rid of the virus within six months.



island health

Hepatitis B

Acute Vs Chronic Hepatitis B

According to the World Health Organization, more than 2 billion people living today have been infected with Hepatitis B at some time in their life. Of these, about 350 million remain chronically infected and become carriers of the virus.

When the virus continues to multiply in the body for more than six months, a person has chronic Hepatitis B infection.

Although most people with chronic Hepatitis B have no symptoms, they can still pass the virus to others – especially to people they live with or have sex with.

Chronic hepatitis can lead to complications such as cirrhosis, liver cancer, liver failure and death.

Key Facts About Hepatitis B

- Hepatitis B is a viral infection that attacks the liver and can cause both acute and chronic disease
- The virus is transmitted through contact with the blood or other body fluids of an infected person
- About 600 000 people die every year due to the consequences of hepatitis B
- Hepatitis B is an important occupational hazard for health workers
- Hepatitis B is preventable with the currently available safe and effective vaccine

Infection Prevention & Control

- Routine practices are all that are needed when managing patients or residents diagnosed with Hepatitis B.
- Gloves should be worn when dealing with all bodily fluids
- Ensure good hand hygiene with soap and water or alcohol based hand rub.
- All patient body fluid spillages are treated as potentially infectious and dealt with in the same way.
- There is no different procedure for dealing with body fluid spillages for patients / residents with hepatitis
Immunization: There is a safe and effective vaccine available to prevent a person from getting hepatitis B. In Canada, all provinces and territories have free immunization programs for children and certain groups of adults.

For More Information...

Hepatitis B Foundation: <http://www.hepb.org/>

WHO: HepB facts <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs204/en/>
Lurman A (1885). "Eine icterus epidemic". Berl Klin Wochenschr (in German) 22: 20–3

Disclaimer: All content in this reference guide is presented only as of the date printed or indicated, and may be superseded by subsequent documents or for other reasons. In addition, you are responsible to ensure you are receiving the most up to date information.