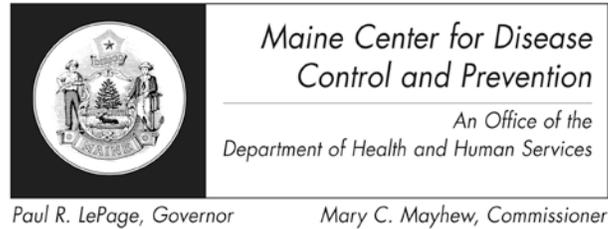


Hepatitis B

Fact Sheet



What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a liver disease caused by the Hepatitis B virus (HBV). The virus attacks the liver and causes inflammation. If the virus remains in the body for more than 6 months, this can lead to cirrhosis (scarring), liver cancer, liver failure, and death.

How do you know if you have hepatitis B?

Only a blood test can tell for sure.

How is HBV spread?

HBV is spread when blood, semen or other bodily fluid infected with the hepatitis B virus enters the body of a person who is not infected. For example, HBV is spread through:

- birth (spread from an infected mother to her baby during birth)
- unprotected sex with an infected partner
- sharing needles, syringes, or other drug-injection equipment
- sharing items such as razors or toothbrushes with an infected person
- direct contact with the blood or open sores of an infected person
- exposure to blood from needlesticks or other sharp instruments

Hepatitis B is not spread through food or water, sharing eating utensils, breastfeeding, hugging, kissing, coughing, sneezing, or by casual contact.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis B?

Sometimes a person with HBV infection has no symptoms at all. The older you are, the more likely you are to have symptoms. You might be infected with HBV (and be spreading the virus) and not know it.

If you have symptoms, they might include:

- yellow skin or yellowing of the whites of your eyes (jaundice)
- tiredness
- loss of appetite
- nausea
- abdominal discomfort
- dark urine
- clay-colored stools
- joint pain

How long does it take for symptoms to occur after exposure to HBV?

If symptoms occur, they arise on average 12 weeks (range 9-21 weeks) after exposure to HBV. Symptoms occur in about 70% of patients. Symptoms are more likely appear in adults than in children.

If I think I have been exposed to HBV, what should I do?

Contact your healthcare provider or Maine CDC. If a person who has been exposed to HBV gets the hepatitis B vaccine and/or a shot called "HBIG" (hepatitis B immune globulin) as soon as possible after exposure (preferably within 24 hours), infection may be prevented.

Who is at risk for hepatitis B?

Those who:

- have sex with an infected person
- have multiple sex partners
- have a sexually transmitted disease
- are men who have sexual contact with other men
- inject drugs or share needles, syringes, or other drug equipment
- live with a person who has chronic Hepatitis B
- are infants born to infected mothers
- are exposed to blood on the job
- are hemodialysis patients
- travel to countries with moderate to high rates of Hepatitis B

Your risk is higher if your parents were born in Southeast Asia, Africa, the Amazon Basin in South America, the Pacific Islands, or the Middle East.

Is there a treatment for hepatitis B?

There are no approved medications available for acute (recently acquired) HBV infection. There are antiviral drugs available for the treatment of people with chronic HBV infection.

What does the term "chronic hepatitis B" mean?

Chronic hepatitis B means that you have a long-term infection; the virus stayed in your body for more than six months after infection. The risk of progressing to chronic infection depends on age (i.e., 2-6% of people over 5 years of age; 30% of children 1-5 years of age; and up to 90% of infants). People with chronic hepatitis B can infect others and are at increased risk of serious liver disease, including cirrhosis and liver cancer. In the United States, an estimated 1.2 million people are chronically infected with HBV.

Can Hepatitis B be prevented?

Yes. The best way to prevent it is by getting the Hepatitis B vaccine. The vaccine is safe and effective, and is usually given as 3-4 shots over a 6-month period.

If you are pregnant, should you worry about hepatitis B?

Yes, you should get a blood test to check for HBV infection early in your pregnancy. This test is called Hepatitis B Surface Antigen (HBsAg).

- If you test negative early in pregnancy, but continue behaviors that put you at risk for Hepatitis B (e.g., multiple sex partners or injection drug use), you should get retested closer to delivery.
- If your test is positive, this means you are infected with HBV and can give the virus to your baby. Your baby should receive the first dose of Hepatitis B vaccine, along with another shot, Hepatitis B immune globulin (called HBIG), within 12 hours of birth. The second dose of vaccine should be given at 1-2 months of age and the third dose at 6 months of age. Your baby will then be tested for response to the vaccine at 3-6 months of age.

Can I donate blood, organs, or semen if I have Hepatitis B?

No, if you ever tested positive for HBV, experts recommend that you not donate blood, organs, or semen.

How long can HBV survive outside the body?

HBV can survive outside the body for at least 7 days and still be capable of causing infection.

What do you use to remove HBV from environmental surfaces?

Clean up any blood spills - including dried blood, which can still be infectious – using a cleaning solution of one part household bleach to 10 parts water. Use gloves and eye protection when cleaning up any blood spills.

Where can I get more information?

For more information, contact your healthcare provider. You can also contact Maine CDC by calling 1-800-821-5821 or visiting our website at <http://www.maine.gov/idepi>. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website - <http://www.cdc.gov> – is another excellent source of health information.