



## HEPATITIS B

### What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a contagious, sexually-transmitted blood-borne infection (STBBI) caused by the Hepatitis B virus (HBV). The virus attacks the liver and can cause both acute and chronic disease. Most healthy adults are able to fight the infection and clear the virus within 6 months. For others, the infection leads to a “chronic” or lifelong illness causing serious health problems such as liver cirrhosis or cancer. Young children infected with HBV are the most likely to develop chronic infections.

### What are the symptoms?

- More than half of the people who get the virus will have no symptoms and do not know they are infected.
- Symptoms usually appear 2 to 3 months after exposure to the virus. During this period of acute infection, people can have symptoms such as jaundice (skin and eyes turn yellow), fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, dark urine, pale stools, joint pain, and pain in the stomach.

### How is HBV spread?

HBV is highly infectious. It is usually spread when blood, semen or other body fluids of an infected person enter the body of someone else. You can pass the virus on to others even if you have no symptoms.

HBV is most commonly spread through:

- Sharing needles, syringes and other drug use equipment.
- Unprotected vaginal, anal, or oral sexual contact with an infected person.
- Sharing personal care articles such as razors, nail clippers or toothbrushes with an infected person.
- Tattoo equipment that was not properly sterilized.
- From an infected mother to a newborn infant at the time of birth.

HBV is not spread through breastfeeding, sharing eating utensils, sneezing, coughing or holding hands.

### How is HBV diagnosed?

- A blood test will determine if you have been exposed to the virus.
- You should be tested for other sexually transmitted and blood borne infections.
- Most people who get the virus do not know they are infected. If you think you are at risk for HBV or if you are pregnant, you should get tested.

### How is HBV treated?

To reduce the risk of further damage to the liver, people with HBV should:

- Be immunized against Hepatitis A.
- Minimize alcohol intake.
- Check with a health care professional before taking prescription or over-the-counter drugs.

## Who is at risk of HBV infections?

Anyone can get HBV, but you are at greater risk if you:

- Have unprotected vaginal, anal, or oral sex with someone infected with HBV.
- Have multiple sex partners and use drugs.
- Live in the same house with someone who has HBV.
- Are an infant born to a mother infected with HBV.
- Are born to an immigrant or adopted from an area where HBV is widespread.
- Share needles, straws, pipes, spoons, cookers, and other drug use equipment.
- Are a man having sex with men.
- Are a healthcare worker exposed to blood and body fluids.
- Are a Hemodialysis patient.

## How can HBV be prevented?

The best way to prevent HBV is to get vaccinated.

- HBV vaccine is available as part of the routine childhood immunization schedule; for certain medical conditions including Hepatitis C and HIV; and for certain high risk groups such as men who have sex with men and those who use illicit drugs. Check with your healthcare provider to see if you have had or are eligible for the vaccine.
- Individuals who are sexually active should:
  - » Limit the number of sexual partners and avoid sex with people whose sexual history is unknown.
  - » Always use condoms when having sex (vaginal, oral, or anal). A dental dam (a sheet of latex) or a male condom cut open should be used for oral sex.
  - » Avoid the use of alcohol and other drugs that might cloud thinking and lead to high-risk behavior.
- Individuals who inject drugs should:
  - » Not share needles or injection drug equipment with others.
  - » Use only clean needles and equipment
- Be cautious about body piercings, tattoos and acupuncture. Make sure single-use, disposable needles are used and that all other equipment is disinfected and sterile.
- Don't share personal items like nail clippers, razors, or toothbrushes.
- If you are likely to be in contact with blood or other bodily fluids in your work take appropriate precautions, such as wearing latex gloves.

If you have HBV

- Do not donate blood, semen, tissue or organs unless recommended otherwise.
- Be very careful to make sure that other people are not exposed to your blood.
- Cover any wounds with a waterproof bandage.

## What is the Public Health response?

If you are diagnosed with HBV, your health-care provider will treat you and give you information on sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections (STBBI). A Public Health nurse may contact you to support you in contacting your partners.

All discussions are strictly confidential.

## Further Information

For additional information, contact your health-care provider, Tele-Care 811, local Public Health office or visit the [government of New Brunswick website](#).