

Information for people with hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is a viral disease that damages your liver. While children usually develop a mild illness it can be more serious for adults.

People with the disease do not need to isolate, but have to take precautions to ease their recovery and reduce the risk of passing on hepatitis B to others.



Symptoms – what to expect

Common symptoms of hepatitis B include:

- Nausea and vomiting
- Yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice)
- Dark coloured urine
- Pale coloured bowel motions
- Generally feeling unwell and tired
- Loss of appetite
- Stomach upsets and pains
- Mild fever
- General aches and pains

It can take several months for someone infected with the virus to become unwell. Around 1 in 5 people with hepatitis B do not get any symptoms, however they can still pass it on to others.



Your recovery

If you have hepatitis B it's important to carefully manage your health and have regular medical check-ups with your healthcare provider.

You should:

- Avoid alcohol, to help protect your liver
- Maintain a healthy diet with plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables
- Exercise as your energy levels allow

Your doctor will need to:

- Regularly carry out tests to check your body is clearing the virus and your liver is recovering.
- Provide advice on which medicines you can take. Some prescription medicines may not be suitable for people with liver disease, e.g. oral contraceptives, and herbal medicines can also be damaging.
- Provide advice on whether you should have the hepatitis A vaccine, as this disease can be more severe for people who are hepatitis B carriers.

Most people with the disease recover from the virus in a few months. Their body is able to clear the infection by itself and they do not have any further problems.

Around 1 in 20 people with hepatitis B are unable to clear the infection. While they may feel well, they can continue to infect others. They may also have long-term liver issues. These people are called 'hepatitis B carriers'. A blood test is the only way to find out whether a person has cleared the infection or has become a carrier. Treatment will be focused on preventing long term liver damage.

Children with hepatitis B may only have mild symptoms. They are more likely to become carriers and develop long term problems.

If you have hepatitis B and become very unwell contact your doctor, or call Healthline for free anytime on 0800 611 116. In an emergency call 111.



Reducing the risk to others

There is no need to isolate if you have hepatitis B, but as you could still pass on the disease to others you should take precautions. People should not come into contact with your blood or other bodily fluids.

If you have hepatitis B you should not:

- donate blood, tissue or organs
- share needles
- share toothbrushes
- share razors or any object that could cause bleeding
- have unprotected sex
- share chewing gum or pre-chewed food

Hepatitis B is not spread by holding hands, hugging, kissing on the cheek, sneezing or coughing, food or water, or visiting an infected person.

A doctor will tell you when you are no longer infectious to others. This may take several months.



Additional precautions to take

- Cover cuts and abrasions with water-proof dressings. If you have dermatitis or other weeping skin conditions try to avoid spreading ooze from the affected area.
- Disinfect any surfaces where there has been fresh or dried blood or spilt bodily fluids. Use household bleach mixed with water, and leave it on the surface for half an hour before wiping clean.
- If your blood or other bodily fluids come into contact with clothes or other materials you should get rid of these in a plastic bag.
- Tell others who could be exposed to your blood you have the disease (e.g. dentists, doctors, nurses, lab technicians, tattooists, acupuncturists, etc.).
- Tell your employer if there is a risk of anyone coming into contact with your bodily fluids at work. If you are a health care worker it's recommended you discuss your diagnosis with Occupational Health.
- If you become pregnant inform your Lead Maternity Carer that you have hepatitis B. It is very important that the baby is vaccinated at birth against hepatitis B. They will need four immunisation doses starting as soon as the baby is born.
- If you play a contact sport discuss with your doctor whether you should keep this up, and wear protecting clothing if necessary.



For more information visit:
www.arphs.nz/hepatitis-b