



Central Michigan District Health Department
“Promoting Healthy Families, Healthy Communities”

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HEPATITIS B

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a serious disease caused by a virus that attacks the liver. While 95% of adults infected with Hepatitis B recover completely, 5% of adults infected with Hepatitis B may develop lifelong infection. Chronic individuals are at an increased risk of developing cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver, liver cancer and liver failure.

How is it spread?

Transmission occurs when blood from an infected person enters the body of a person who is not infected. Hepatitis B virus is spread through having sex with an infected person without using a condom, by sharing drugs or needles when injecting drugs, through needlesticks or exposures on the job, sharing of razors or toothbrushes with an infected person, or from an infected mother to her baby during birth. Persons at risk for HBV infection might also be at risk for infection with hepatitis C virus (HCV) or HIV.

What are the symptoms?

Some people will not have symptoms. Signs and symptoms are less common in children than adults. Symptoms can include dark urine, fever, jaundice, fatigue, abdominal pain, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, and joint pain.

Who are the groups at risk?

Due to the way that Hepatitis B virus is spread those at risk would include:

- Persons with multiple sex partners or diagnosis of a sexually transmitted disease
- Men who have sex with men
- Sex contacts of infected persons
- Injection-drug users
- Household contacts of chronically infected persons
- Infants born to infected mothers
- Infant/children of immigrants from areas with high rates of HBV infection
- Health-care and public safety workers with exposure to blood
- Hemodialysis patients

What is the treatment for Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B infected persons should be evaluated by their doctor for liver disease and treatments available.

How can I guard against the spread of this disease?

- Hepatitis B vaccine is the best protection.
- If you are having sex, but not with one steady partner, use latex condoms correctly and every time you have sex. The benefit of latex condoms in preventing infection with HBV is unknown, but proper use might reduce transmission.
- If you are pregnant, you should get a blood test for hepatitis B. Infants born to HBV-infected mothers should be given HBIG (hepatitis B immune globulin) and vaccine within 12 hours after birth.
- Do not inject drugs; if you inject drugs, stop and get into a treatment program; if you can't stop, never share drugs, needles, syringes, water or "works", and get vaccinated against hepatitis A and B.
- Do not share personal care items that might have blood on them (razors, toothbrushes).
- Consider the risks if you are thinking about getting a tattoo, branding or body piercing. You might get infected if the tools have someone else's blood on them or if the artist or piercer does not follow good health practices.
- If you are interested in getting a tattoo, branding or body piercing, check to make sure the body art facility is licensed by the Michigan Department of Community Health.
- If you have or had hepatitis B, do not donate blood, organs, or tissue.
- If you are a health-care or public safety worker, get vaccinated against hepatitis B, and always follow routine barrier precautions and safely handle needles and other sharps.