

Hepatitis B

Also known as Hep B

Hepatitis B is a viral infection which can be passed on during sex without a condom or by sharing unsterile injecting equipment with someone who has Hep B.

QUICK FACTS

- Hep B is one of several viruses which can cause-hepatitis.
- Some people may experience flu-like symptoms including muscle aches and pain, fever and swollen glands
- Effective treatment for Hep B is available and can prevent serious liver damage
- Vaccination against Hep B is available

What is this?

Hepatitis B-is a viral infection which can be passed on through blood, semen and vaginal fluids.

Hep B can be passed on by having sex without a condom with someone who has Hep B. It can also be passed on by sharing injecting equipment or from tattooing or body piercing with unsterile equipment.

An estimated 232,000 people are living in Australia with Hep B infection. Hep B infection can have serious health effects.

How do you get it?

The Hep B virus is found in blood and in other bodily fluids such as semen, vaginal fluid and saliva.

You can get Hep B when the blood or body fluids of a person with Hep B enters your blood stream or body, as follows:

- vaginal or anal sex without a condom
- sharing injecting equipment-
- skin piercing and tattoos-with equipment that is not cleaned and sterilised properly
- sharing razor blades or toothbrushes with someone who has the virus
- parent to child - from a mother (or pregnant person)-with Hep B to their baby during pregnancy and delivery
- wound contact - where the blood from a person with Hep B comes into contact with an open cut or wound of a person who does not have the virus

All blood and blood products produced for medical purposes in Australia are carefully screened for Hep B and other blood-borne viruses.

If you think you've been exposed to Hep B, see your doctor immediately. In some instances, your doctor may be able to give

you treatment which greatly reduces the risk of you becoming infected.

What are the symptoms?

Many people who become infected with Hep B show no signs of infection.

Children are less likely to have symptoms than adults.

If symptoms are present, they often last only a few weeks and may include:

- loss of appetite
- nausea
- vomiting-
- tiredness

In more severe cases, additional symptoms can occur:

- pain in the liver and joints
- fever
- jaundice

Most adults infected with Hep B completely recover and do not become infected again.

Long term infection

About 5% of adults who become infected with the Hep B virus develop long term (or chronic) Hep B infection.

Chronic infection means the virus stays in the bloodstream for a person's entire life. A person with chronic Hep B may carry and transmit the virus for life without showing any signs or symptoms and may not know they have it.

Chronic infection increases the risk of a person developing-cirrhosis-and liver cancer in later life.

How do you test for it?

A blood test can tell if you have been infected with Hep B or have been vaccinated against it.

How is it treated?

If your body gets rid of the virus itself, you will require no treatment.

If you develop chronic Hep B, you should discuss treatment options and lifestyle changes with your doctor.

Antiviral medications are available to try to get rid of the virus and reduce liver damage. Your doctor may also refer you to a liver specialist and regularly monitor your health.

How can I protect myself?

You can protect yourself from Hep B by:

- **vaccination** - the best protection against Hep B and is recommended for everyone. Talk to your doctor about vaccination
- **practicing safe sex** - by using condoms every time you have anal or vaginal sex
- **never sharing needles**, syringes and other injecting equipment such as spoons, swabs or water if you are injecting drugs. Always use sterile needles and syringes which are available through needle and syringe programs and some chemists and always wash your hands before and after injecting
- **wearing gloves** - if providing first aid or cleaning up blood or body fluids

Hep B vaccination

For adults, a full course of Hep B vaccination consists of 3 doses over six months. All 3 doses are required to give 90% protection.

Vaccination for Hep B is recommended and available for in Victoria on the National Immunisation Program Schedule for the following groups:

- all babies
- children born after 1 May 2000 who have not received a course of hepatitis B vaccine
- children in year 7 via a school-based program who have not received a course of hepatitis B vaccine
- 'catch-up' for adolescents in secondary school who missed the Year 7 hepatitis B course and are over 15 years of age
- people who inject drugs
- people who have been in prison
- people who have a chronic liver disease or hepatitis C

People from the following groups are also recommended to be vaccinated against Hep B:

- men who have sex with men
- people who have a sexual partner with Hep B
- people who live with someone who has Hep B
- people having kidney dialysis
- people living with HIV and other immunosuppressive conditions
- people receiving blood products
- people adopting children from overseas
- people at occupational risk, such as health care workers, dentists, embalmers, tattooists and body-piercers and staff members at a facilities-for people with intellectual disabilities

Side effects of the Hep B vaccination are uncommon, but may include:

- nausea, mild fever
- soreness, redness and swelling in the area where the injection was given
- joint pain

Where can I get help?

- Visit a [sexual health service near you](#)
- Visit your local doctor
- Visit your local community health centre

DISCLAIMER

This fact sheet provides general sexual health information and is not intended to replace the need for a consultation with your doctor.

If you have concerns about your health, you should seek advice from your doctor.

If you require urgent care, you should go to your nearest Emergency Department or call [000](#).