

# What I need to know about Hepatitis B



NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH  
National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse

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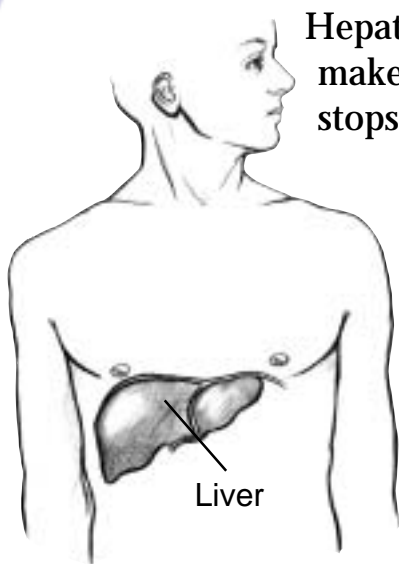
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## What is hepatitis B?

**Hepatitis B is a liver disease.**



Hepatitis (HEP-ah-TY-tis) makes your liver swell and stops it from working right.

You need a healthy liver. The liver does many things to keep you alive. The liver fights infections and stops bleeding. It removes drugs and other poisons from your blood. The liver also stores energy for when you need it.

## What causes hepatitis B?

**Hepatitis B is caused by a virus.**

A virus is a germ that causes sickness. (For example, the flu is caused by a virus.) People can pass viruses to each other. The virus that causes hepatitis B is called the hepatitis B virus.

## How could I get hepatitis B?

**Hepatitis B is spread by contact with an infected person's blood, semen, or other body fluid.**

**You could get hepatitis B by**

- having sex with an infected person without using a condom
- sharing drug needles
- getting a tattoo or body piercing with dirty tools that were used on someone else
- getting pricked with a needle that has infected blood on it (health care workers can get hepatitis B this way)
- sharing a toothbrush or razor with an infected person



An infected woman can give hepatitis B to her baby at birth or through her breast milk.

**You can NOT get hepatitis B by**

- shaking hands with an infected person
- hugging an infected person
- sitting next to an infected person

## What are the symptoms?

**Hepatitis B can make you feel like you have the flu.**

**You might**

- feel tired
- feel sick to your stomach
- have a fever
- not want to eat
- have stomach pain
- have diarrhea



**Some people have**

- dark yellow urine
- light-colored stools
- yellowish eyes and skin

**Some people don't have any symptoms.**

If you have symptoms, or think you might have hepatitis B, go to a doctor.

## What are the tests for hepatitis B?

**To check for hepatitis B, the doctor will test your blood.**

These tests show if you have hepatitis B and how serious it is.



The doctor will take some blood to check for hepatitis B.

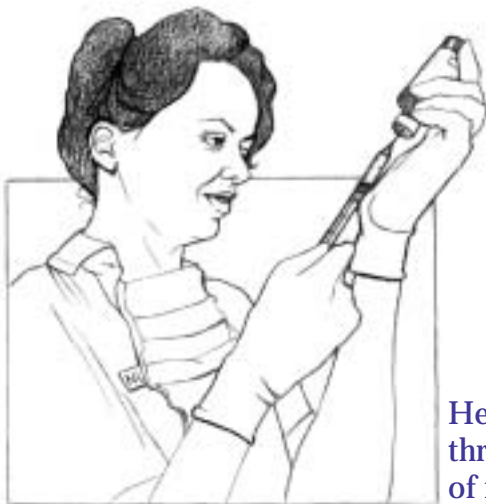
**The doctor may also do a liver biopsy.**

A biopsy (BYE-op-see) is a simple test. The doctor removes a tiny piece of your liver through a needle. The doctor checks the piece of liver for signs of hepatitis B and liver damage.

## How is hepatitis B treated?

### Treatment for hepatitis B may involve

- **A drug called interferon** (in-ter-FEAR-on). It is given through shots. Most people are treated for 4 months.
- **A drug called lamivudine** (la-MIV-you-deen). You take it by mouth once a day. Treatment is usually for one year. Sometimes lamivudine is combined with interferon.
- **Surgery.** Over time, hepatitis B may cause your liver to stop working. If that happens, you will need a new liver. The surgery is called a liver transplant. It involves taking out the old, damaged liver and putting in a new, healthy one from a donor.



Hepatitis B is treated through shots of medicine.

## How can I protect myself?

### You can get the hepatitis B vaccine.

A vaccine is a drug that you take when you are healthy that keeps you from getting sick. Vaccines teach your body to attack certain viruses, like the hepatitis B virus.

The hepatitis B vaccine is given through three shots. All babies should get the vaccine. Infants get the first shot within 12 hours of birth. They get the second shot at age 1 to 2 months and the third shot between ages 6 and 18 months.

Older children and adults can get the vaccine, too. They get three shots over 6 months. Children who have not had the vaccine should get it.

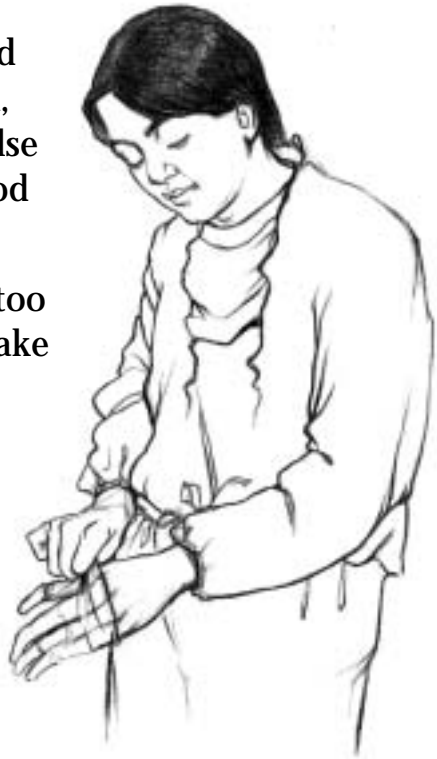
You need **all** of the shots to be protected. If you miss a shot, call your doctor or clinic right away to set up a new appointment.



Vaccines protect you from getting hepatitis B.

## **You can also protect yourself and others from hepatitis B if you**

- use a condom when you have sex
- don't share drug needles with anyone
- wear gloves if you have to touch anyone's blood
- don't use an infected person's toothbrush, razor, or anything else that could have blood on it
- also, if you get a tattoo or body piercing, make sure it is done with clean tools



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People who touch blood at work should wear gloves to protect themselves from hepatitis B.

## **For more information**

You can also get information about hepatitis B from these groups:

### **American Liver Foundation**

75 Maiden Lane, Suite 603

New York, NY 10038

Phone: 1-800-465-4837 (This is a free call.)

Email: [webmail@liverfoundation.org](mailto:webmail@liverfoundation.org)

Internet: [www.liverfoundation.org](http://www.liverfoundation.org)

### **Hepatitis Foundation International (HFI)**

504 Blick Drive

Silver Spring, MD 20904-2901

Phone: 1-800-891-0707 or (301) 622-4200

Fax: (301) 622-4702

Email: [hepfi@hepfi.org](mailto:hepfi@hepfi.org)

Internet: [www.hepfi.org](http://www.hepfi.org)

## More in the series

There are other types of hepatitis. The National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse also has booklets about hepatitis A and hepatitis C:

- *What I need to know about Hepatitis A*
- *What I need to know about Hepatitis C*

You can get a free copy of each of these booklets by calling 1-800-891-5389 or (301) 654-3810, or by writing to

**NDDIC**  
2 Information Way  
Bethesda, MD 20892-3570

Hepatitis information for health professionals is also available.



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The National Digestive Diseases Information Clearinghouse (NDDIC) is a service of the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK). The NIDDK is part of the National Institutes of Health under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Established in 1980, the clearinghouse provides information about digestive diseases to people with digestive disorders and to their families, health care professionals, and the public. NDDIC answers inquiries, develops and distributes publications, and works closely with professional and patient organizations and Government agencies to coordinate resources about digestive diseases.

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