



What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a virus (HBV) that enters the bloodstream and then infects the liver.

How is the virus spread?

HBV is spread when blood or body fluids from an infected person enters the body of a person who is not infected. For example, HBV is spread through having sex with an infected person without using a condom, by sharing drugs or drug paraphernalia, through needlesticks or sharps exposures on the job, or from an infected mother to her baby during birth. It is not spread through food, water, or casual contact

Who gets hepatitis B?

Anyone can get hepatitis B. However, certain people have a greater chance of becoming infected; these people include IV drug users, babies of infected mothers, sexual partners of infected persons, and medical and dental workers.

What are the symptoms?

Most people who get HBV infection as babies or children don't look or feel sick at all. Similarly, almost half of adults who get infected don't have any symptoms or signs of the disease. If people do have signs or symptoms, they may include tiredness, nausea, vomiting, fever, stomach pain, tea-colored urine, and yellowing of skin and eyes. Long-term infection is common and may result in liver disease or cancer.

How long can an infected person spread the virus?

A person can spread the virus as long as it remains in their blood. Most adults will get rid of the virus within 4 to 6 months; however, about 1 out of every 10 infected adults will become lifelong carriers, meaning they will probably never get rid of the virus. Nine out of 10 infected babies will become life-long carriers. Carriers can infect others and are at increased risk of serious liver disease including cirrhosis and liver cancer.

How is hepatitis B diagnosed?

The only way to know if you are currently infected with HBV, have recovered, are chronically infected, or are susceptible, is by having blood tests.

What is the treatment for hepatitis B?

There are medications available to treat long-lasting (chronic) HBV-infection. These work for some people, but there is no cure for hepatitis B when you first get it. That is why prevention is so important.

Is there a vaccine to prevent hepatitis B?

Yes, there is a vaccine to protect against hepatitis B. It is recommended for newborn babies, all children 0-18 years of age who have not been vaccinated, anyone whose behavior puts them at high risk for HBV infection, and persons whose jobs expose them to human blood.

How can infection with hepatitis B be prevented?

Hepatitis B vaccine is the best protection against HBV. Three doses are commonly needed for complete protection. Never share needles for drug use, ear piercing, tattooing, or any other purpose. Avoid contact with the blood and body fluids of any other person. Use condoms when having sex.

What can be done if a person comes into contact with someone infected with hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B immune globulin (HBIG) and hepatitis B vaccine can prevent infection if given very soon after an exposure. This treatment is available from a physician. Infants, whose mothers have recently been infected with hepatitis B or are carriers, should begin vaccination at time of birth. Remaining vaccinations can be received at the health department through the Perinatal Hepatitis B Program.