

# HEPATITIS B

## Are you at risk?



### Who should be tested for Hepatitis B?

Testing for Hepatitis B is recommended for certain groups of people, including:

- People born in Asia, Africa, and other regions with moderate or high rates of Hepatitis B (see map)
- Unvaccinated people whose parents are from regions with high rates of Hepatitis B
- Anyone having sex with a person infected with Hepatitis B
- People who live with someone with Hepatitis B
- Men who have sexual encounters with other men
- People who inject drugs
- All pregnant women
- People with HIV infection
- People on hemodialysis
- People who receive chemotherapy or other types of immunosuppressive therapy

### What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a contagious liver disease that results from infection with the Hepatitis B virus. When first infected, a person can develop an “acute” infection, which can range in severity from a very mild illness with few or no symptoms to a serious condition requiring hospitalization. **Acute** Hepatitis B refers to the first 6 months after someone is exposed to the Hepatitis B virus. Some people are able to fight the infection and clear the virus. For others, the infection remains and leads to a “chronic,” or lifelong, illness. **Chronic** Hepatitis B refers to the illness that occurs when the Hepatitis B virus remains in a person’s body. Over time, the infection can cause serious health problems.

### How is Hepatitis B spread?

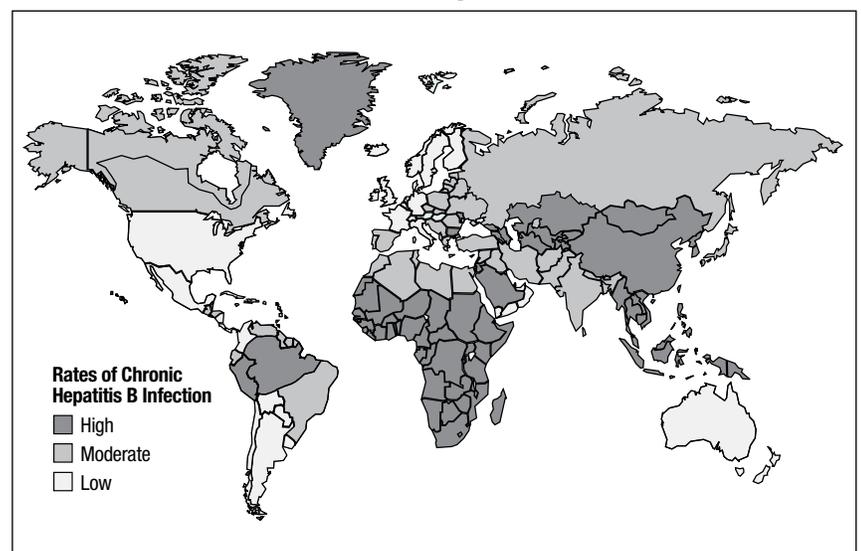
Hepatitis B is usually spread when blood, semen, or other body fluids from a person infected with the Hepatitis B virus enter the body of someone who is not infected. This can happen through having sex with an infected partner; sharing needles, syringes, or other injection drug equipment; or from direct contact with the blood or open sores of an infected person. Hepatitis B can also be passed from an infected mother to her baby at birth.

**Approximately 1.2 million people in the United States and 350 million people worldwide have Hepatitis B. Most are unaware of their infection.**

### Is Hepatitis B common?

Yes. Hepatitis B is very common worldwide. Most people with Hepatitis B were infected with the virus at birth or during early childhood and developed a lifelong chronic infection. Many of those infected are unaware that they have Hepatitis B, especially since they may not have symptoms. As a result, they can unknowingly spread the disease to others, including people they live with, sexual partners, and—for women—their newborns.

### Worldwide Rates of Chronic Hepatitis B





## How is Hepatitis B treated?

For acute Hepatitis B, doctors usually recommend rest, adequate nutrition, fluids, and close medical monitoring. Some people may need to be hospitalized.

People with chronic infection should see a doctor experienced in treating Hepatitis B. He or she can determine the most appropriate medical care. People with chronic Hepatitis B need to be monitored on a regular basis, and some will benefit from medication. Several new treatments are available which can delay or reverse the effects of liver disease.

## What can people with Hepatitis B do to take care of their liver?

People with chronic Hepatitis B should see a doctor regularly. They also should ask their health professional before taking any prescription or over-the-counter medications—including herbal supplements or vitamins—as they can potentially damage the liver. People with chronic Hepatitis B should also avoid alcohol since it can accelerate liver damage.

## What are the symptoms of Hepatitis B?

Many people with Hepatitis B do not have symptoms and do not know they are infected. Even though a person has no symptoms, the virus can still be detected in the blood.

Symptoms of Hepatitis B can take up to 30 years to develop. Damage to the liver can silently occur during this time. When symptoms do appear, they often are a sign of advanced liver disease and can include fever, fatigue, abdominal pain, and jaundice.

## How serious is Hepatitis B?

Over time, approximately 15%–25% of people with chronic Hepatitis B develop serious liver problems, including liver damage, cirrhosis, liver failure, and even liver cancer. Every year, approximately 3,000 people in the United States and more than 600,000 people worldwide die from Hepatitis B-related liver disease.

## How is Hepatitis B diagnosed?

Doctors use one or more blood tests to diagnose Hepatitis B. These blood tests are not part of blood work typically done during regular physical exams.

## Why is it important to get tested for Hepatitis B?

Testing is the best way to determine whether or not a person has Hepatitis B. Many people with Hepatitis B do not know they are infected since they do not look or feel sick. Learning if one is infected is key to diagnosing Hepatitis B early and getting appropriate medical care. Testing can also identify at-risk household members and sexual partners who, if uninfected, can then be vaccinated to protect them from getting Hepatitis B.

## Can Hepatitis B be prevented?

Yes. The best way to prevent Hepatitis B is by getting vaccinated. For adults, the Hepatitis B vaccine is given as a series of 3 shots over a period of 6 months. The entire series is needed for long-term protection. Booster doses are not currently recommended.

## For more information

Talk to your health professional, call your health department, or visit [www.cdc.gov/hepatitis](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis).

You can also call the S.C. AIDS/STD Hotline at 1-800-322-AIDS (2437).



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