

Hepatitis B

The term 'hepatitis' means inflammation of the liver. While other hepatitis viruses include hepatitis A, C, D, E, F and G, hepatitis A, B and C are more common.

Cause

Hepatitis B is caused by the hepatitis B virus.

Symptoms

Many people infected with the virus show no symptoms of infection, although others may experience jaundice (yellowing of the skin and eyes), fever, loss of appetite, tiredness and pains in the joints soon after infection.

Most people recover from hepatitis B, but the long-term effect of infection is often cirrhosis and liver cancer.

How is it transmitted?

Hepatitis B lives in blood, semen and vaginal fluids and is transmitted by unprotected anal, vaginal and oral sex. It can also be passed on through sharing needles and syringes and the use of non-sterile tattooing and body piercing equipment.

A woman with hepatitis B can pass the virus onto her baby during birth.

How do I know if I have it?

Hepatitis B is detected by a blood test. As the test can give a negative result for up to three months after the initial infection, if there is a chance you have been infected the test will need to be repeated three months later.

Treatment/Management

There is no cure for hepatitis B, however a vaccine is available. If you are exposed to the virus, seeking treatment promptly can help prevent infection.

Prevention

Always use condoms and dams to reduce the risk of contracting hepatitis B.

Never share needles, other injecting equipment or personal items such as razors or toothbrushes as they can carry traces of infected blood. If getting a tattoo or body piercing make sure all equipment has been sterilised, and don't share other people's pierced earrings or body jewellery. There is a vaccine available to prevent hepatitis B. See a doctor for more information.

Practising safe sex reduces the risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmissible infections (STIs).

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For further information on sexual health visit the family planning website:
<http://www.fpwa-health.org.au>

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