

# Fact Sheet: Hepatitis B

## What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a contagious liver disease that results from infection with the Hepatitis B virus. It can range in severity from a mild illness lasting a few weeks to a serious, lifelong illness. Hepatitis B can be either acute or chronic. Acute Hepatitis B virus infection is a short-term illness that occurs within the first 6 months after someone is exposed to the Hepatitis B virus. Acute infection can lead to chronic infection. Chronic Hepatitis B virus infection is a long-term illness that occurs when the Hepatitis B virus remains in a person's body. A vaccine is available.

## Signs and Symptoms

Symptoms of acute Hepatitis B, if they appear, can include:

- Fever
- Fatigue
- Loss of appetite
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Clay-colored bowel movements
- Jaundice (yellow color in the skin or the eyes)

Usually, symptoms appear three months after exposure, but they can appear any time between six weeks and six months after exposure.

## How is it spread?

Hepatitis B is spread when blood, semen, or other body fluid infected with the Hepatitis B virus enters the body of a person who is not infected. People can get the virus through activities such as:

- Birth (spread from an infected mother to her baby during birth)
- Sex with an infected partner
- Sharing needles, syringes, or other drug-injection equipment
- Exposure to blood from needle sticks or other sharp instruments

## Treatment

There is no medication available to treat acute Hepatitis B. During this short-term infection, doctors usually recommend rest, good nutrition, and fluids, although some people may need to be hospitalized. People with chronic Hepatitis B virus infection should seek the care or consultation of a doctor with experience treating Hepatitis B.

## Prevention

The best way to prevent Hepatitis B is by getting the Hepatitis B vaccine. The Hepatitis B vaccine is safe and effective and is usually given as three or four shots over a 6-month period.

- Children should get their first dose of Hepatitis B vaccine at birth and complete the vaccine series by six to eighteen months of age.
- Any adult who is at risk for Hepatitis B virus infection or who wants to be vaccinated should talk to a health professional about getting the vaccine series.

This fact sheet is for informational purposes and is not meant to be used for self-diagnosis or as a substitute for consultation with a health care professional. For more information about communicable disease, speak to your health care provider or call the Ingham County Health Department at (517)-887-4308.

Visit our website at <http://hd.ingham.org/Home>

or the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention at: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov)  
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