

Hepatitis B Fact Sheet

What is Hepatitis?

“Hepatitis” means inflammation of the liver. Drinking alcohol, some medications and bacterial infections can all cause Hepatitis. Hepatitis also refers to viral infections that attack the liver. There are three primary kinds of hepatitis: A, B and C. This fact sheet focuses on Hepatitis B.

How serious is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a serious disease caused by the Hepatitis B Virus (HBV). HBV attacks the liver and is 100 times more infectious than HIV. HBV can be an acute (sudden serious illness) or a chronic (life long) condition. In about 15%-25% of people who have chronic HBV, it causes serious problems, such as liver damage, cirrhosis, liver failure, liver cancer and death (CDC). Up to two million individuals in the United States are chronically infected with HBV, and many of those people are men who have sex with men (MSM) (CDC). Of those people who are chronically infected, 25% will die of HBV-related liver disease (if they don't get treatment) (CDC).

How is Hepatitis B transmitted?

HBV is spread when infected bodily fluids (semen, vaginal fluid and/or blood) enters the body. It is transmitted through:

- Unprotected sex;
- Sharing needles for any reason;
- Sharing items contaminated with blood (razor blades, toothbrushes, etc.); and
- Perinatal (mother to child), but vaccination of newborn babies reduces their risk

Should I get tested for Hepatitis B?

There is a test you can take to see if you are infected with HBV. The HBV test is a blood test that can be performed in a doctor's office or local clinic. People at risk for HBV should get tested. Risk factors include:

- Unprotected sex;
- Sharing needles for any reason; and
- Getting tattoos or piercings from unlicensed businesses.

How can I prevent Hepatitis B?

The best way to prevent Hepatitis B is to get vaccinated. The HBV vaccine is 3 shots over 6 months for the best protection. Currently, you can get vaccinated for both Hepatitis A and B at the same time.

Other ways to prevent becoming infected include:

- Using condoms when having sex; and
- Avoiding sharing needles or works.

Where can I get tested? Where can I get vaccinated?

Many public health clinics and non-profit clinics both test for and vaccinate against HBV. (Please see the hepatitis testing listings when you Click On the Hepatitis B and C Service Category on the main menu— is there a way to imbed a link here?.)

Is there treatment for HBV? What if I have HIV and HBV?

There is treatment for HBV. Your health care provider can tell you if it is time to seek treatment and what you should take. If you have both HIV and HBV, there are certain recommended medications for you to take to fight both viruses.

What is HBV treatment like?

Some HBV treatment is taken in pill form in your mouth; some is taken via an injection. Your health care provider can help you decide which treatment is best for you.

Sources: Centers for Disease Control & Prevention; Wisconsin Department of Health Services; New York State Department of Health; AIDS.com

-For the most up-to-date Hepatitis resources visit www.hivla.org

If delivery of Hep B services has not been offered appropriately, please contact OAPP's warmline @ (800) 260-8787.