

Fact Sheet: Hepatitis B

About Hepatitis B

Hepatitis B is a viral disease of the liver that can become chronic and lead to cirrhosis, liver cancer and death. The hepatitis B virus is an extremely infectious and potentially deadly virus. It can be spread through the exchange of body fluids such as semen or blood, and is 50 to 100 times more infectious than HIV.ⁱ

Hepatitis B can be either acute or chronic. Acute hepatitis B virus infection is a short-term illness that occurs within the first six months after exposure to the hepatitis B virus. Acute infection can — but does not always — 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.ⁱ

There is no cure for hepatitis B, but the disease can be prevented through effective vaccination. The World Health Organization (WHO) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) have set a goal to eliminate all viral hepatitis infections, including hepatitis B, globally by 2030, and are calling for a continued commitment to increase services to eliminate hepatitis.

Increasing Prevalence

Worldwide, an estimated 257 million people are living with hepatitis B,ⁱⁱ including approximately 850,000 in the United States, where an estimated 20,000 new infections occur each year.ⁱ In 2015, new cases of acute hepatitis B increased by more than 20% nationally.ⁱⁱⁱ

Disease Transmission

In adults, sexual transmission of hepatitis B may occur, particularly in unvaccinated men who have sex with men and heterosexual persons who have multiple sex partners or contact with sex workers. Transmission of the virus may also occur through the reuse of needles and syringes either in healthcare settings or among persons who inject drugs. Infection also can occur during medical, surgical and dental procedures, through tattooing or the use of razors contaminated with infected blood.ⁱⁱ

Prevention in Adults with Effective Vaccination

Adult vaccination is recommended for many at-risk populations, including intravenous drug users, people with diabetes, and certain healthcare and public safety workers.

Specifically, the CDC Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP) recommends that the following adults be vaccinated against hepatitis B:^{iv}

- Susceptible sex partners of hepatitis B surface antigen (HBsAg)-positive persons
- Sexually active persons who are not in a long-term, mutually monogamous relationship
- Persons seeking evaluation or treatment for a sexually transmitted disease
- Men who have sex with men
- Injection drug users
- Susceptible household contacts of HBsAg-positive persons
- Healthcare and public safety workers at risk for exposure to blood or blood-contaminated body fluids
- Persons with end-stage renal disease, including pre-dialysis, hemodialysis, peritoneal dialysis and home dialysis patients
- Residents and staff of facilities for developmentally disabled persons
- Travelers to regions with intermediate or high rates of endemic hepatitis B infection
- Persons with chronic liver disease
- Persons with HIV infection
- Unvaccinated adults with diabetes mellitus who are age 19 through 59
- All other persons seeking protection from hepatitis B virus infection

Additionally, the ACIP recommends universal vaccination of adults who receive care in the following healthcare, evaluation or treatment settings where a high portion of clients have known risk factors for hepatitis B infection:^{iv}

- Sexually transmitted disease treatment facilities
- HIV testing and treatment facilities
- Facilities providing drug-abuse treatment and prevention services
- Healthcare settings targeting services to injection drug users
- Correctional facilities
- Healthcare settings targeting services to men who have sex with men
- Chronic hemodialysis facilities and end-stage renal disease programs
- Institutions and nonresidential daycare facilities for developmentally disabled persons

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ⁱCDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hbv/bfaq.htm>.

ⁱⁱWHO. <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs204/en/>.

ⁱⁱⁱCDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/statistics/2015surveillance/commentary.htm>.

^{iv}CDC. <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hbv/hbvfaq.htm#vaccFAQ>