

HEPATITIS B

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a viral infection of the liver. Some people who get hepatitis never feel sick. Others develop flu-like symptoms, such as tiredness and nausea. Some become very ill with fever, abdominal pain, dark urine, clay coloured stools and jaundice (yellowish colour of the skin and eyes). Most people who get hepatitis B recover completely and are then protected from future infections by their own natural immunity. Some people become carriers of hepatitis B and require continuing medical follow-up. Less than 1% become very ill and die.

What is a Hepatitis B Carrier?

A hepatitis B carrier is a person who carries the virus in their blood and body fluids for the rest of their life.

- Six to ten percent of people with hepatitis B become chronic carriers.
- Carriers look and feel well but can continue to pass the infection to others.
- Twenty-five percent of carriers develop cirrhosis (scarring) or cancer of the liver later in life.

How is Hepatitis B Spread?

Hepatitis B is spread to others by:

- contact with infected blood or body fluids (semen, vaginal fluids, saliva). The infected blood or body fluid must enter a break in the skin or be absorbed through a mucous membrane (eyes, mouth, vagina, anus).
- a bite if infected blood or saliva enters the bloodstream.
- a carrier mother who can pass the virus to her baby during childbirth. All pregnant women must be screened for hepatitis B as part of their prenatal care.

Hepatitis B is not spread by water, food, kissing, sneezing or coughing.

Treatment

There is no treatment to kill the virus. Advances are being made with treatments to help slow down the damage to the liver.

How to Prevent Hepatitis B

- Have the hepatitis B vaccine.
- Practice safer sex. Use a latex barrier (condom, dam) every time.
- Never share needles and syringes.
- Never share toothbrushes, razors, nail files or other personal items that may have tiny amounts of blood on them. (The virus lives in dry blood for up to seven days).
- Make sure the equipment is brand new or sterilized for activities that cut the skin, such as tattooing or ear/body piercing,
- Put blood stained articles (tampons, dental floss, bandages) in a tied plastic bag.
- Use routine practices in any situation where blood/body fluids are involved:
 - wear a household rubber glove to reduce the risk of the fluid entering your body through breaks in the skin
 - clean up blood/body fluids spills with soap and water
 - then wipe the surface with freshly made bleach solution 1:10 (¼ cup bleach to 2¼ cups water)
 - let this area dry 10 minutes so the bleach will kill any virus left on the surface.
 - put blood-soiled materials in a sealed bag first before disposing in the garbage
 - remove gloves and wash hands with soap and water for at least 15 seconds.

HEPATITIS B VACCINE

What is the vaccine?

There are 2 types of hepatitis B vaccine in Canada. Both vaccines are yeast-based and do not contain any blood products.

Who should get the vaccine?

All people get vaccinated for hepatitis B. However, there are certain activities that may put people at a higher risk. People should get the vaccine if they:

- are infants born to hepatitis B positive mothers
- share injection/preparation equipment
- have sexual contact with someone who is a case or carrier
- are a household contact of someone who is a case or carrier
- are a health care worker or have a risk of exposure at their job
- are in correctional facilities or institutionalized
- are infected with HIV or hepatitis C
- have other sexually transmitted infections (STI's)

When is screening necessary?

Hepatitis B screening (blood test) will show if you are susceptible, immune or a carrier of Hepatitis B.

If susceptible, you have never had hepatitis B and would benefit from hepatitis B vaccination.

If immune, you have had hepatitis B vaccine or the disease in the past and are now protected. Vaccine is not necessary.

If a carrier, you do not require the vaccine. Hepatitis B vaccine will protect your sexual partners and household contacts.

How often is the vaccine required?

Three doses of the vaccine, given at 0, 1 and 6 months, are needed to provide immunity. Hepatitis B screening, a blood test, to check immunity, is recommended in certain situations. Screening is necessary for:

- sexual partners of Hepatitis B carriers
- babies born to carrier mothers

Are there reasons not to receive the vaccine?

The vaccine is not advised if you are:

- sensitive to any component of the vaccine - yeast, thimersol (contact lens solution), mercury, aluminum.
- currently ill with a high fever, respiratory infection or contagious disease.
- pregnant. (Vaccination may be considered if at high risk of Hepatitis B).
- already a carrier or immune.

What are the side effects?

No serious reactions have been reported from hepatitis B vaccine. Minor side effects include:

- redness, soreness or swelling at the needle site
- tiredness, headache
- slight fever

Where can you get the vaccine?

You can you get the vaccine:

- from your family physician/walk in clinic
NB: vaccine is free of charge to household & sexual contacts of chronic carriers and to babies of chronic carriers. Others will have to pay a fee for the vaccine.
- through the grade 7 hepatitis B immunization program in the schools – vaccine is free of charge.
- at Peel Public Health, Healthy Sexuality clinics when getting testing for STI's or are sexual contacts of a case or carrier – vaccine also free of charge.

**For more information call
Peel Public Health 905-799-7700
and ask for
Sexual Health Information or Communicable
Disease Program
or visit
peelregion.ca/health peelsexualhealth.ca
intheknowpeel.ca**