

HEPATITIS B

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a virus that infects the liver. While most people will recover, some of those infected with hepatitis B remain infected for life. Persons who remain infected are called carriers. Lifelong hepatitis B infection may lead to serious liver damage.

What are the symptoms?

Symptoms may be mild or severe and include nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, abdominal Discomfort, fever, fatigue, dark urine and jaundice (yellow skin and eyes). Many people have no symptoms of hepatitis B.

How is it spread?

Hepatitis B is spread through blood, saliva, semen and vaginal fluids containing the virus. Contact with these fluids may cause infection. Activities which may spread infection include sexual intercourse, sharing needles, getting blood into your mouth, eyes or onto broken skin. Hepatitis B is not spread by coughing, sneezing, a handshake or hug, sitting next to an infected person or by sharing an infected person's food or drink.

How long after infection do the symptoms begin?

Symptoms usually appear 1½ - 6 months after infection.

What is a hepatitis B carrier?

Some persons who become infected with hepatitis B will not fully recover from the infection. The virus is carried in their bodies and can infect others for the rest of their lives. Infected persons must be re-tested for hepatitis B six months after their first test to see if they have become carriers. Infants born to infected mothers are very likely to become carriers unless preventive measures are taken.

How can hepatitis B be prevented?

- Immunizations are available at the health department or doctors' offices. Hepatitis B vaccine is given in a series of 3 shots over 6 months.
- If you may have been exposed to hepatitis B, you can go to an emergency room of your local hospital and receive Hepatitis B Immune Globulin (HBIG). HBIG protects most people from becoming infected if they receive the shot within 7 days of a blood exposure and within 14 days of a sexual exposure.
- Most infants (95%) born to infected mothers who receive HBIG and start the vaccine series at birth will be protected against hepatitis B.

What is the treatment for hepatitis B?

Some experimental treatments are available but no cure is available for hepatitis B carriers.

Where can I learn more about hepatitis B?

Call your personal health care provider or district health office. For referrals and additional information contact the National STD Hotline at (800) 227-8922 or for local Idaho Referrals and information the Idaho CareLine at (800) 926-2588.



South Central Public Health District

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