

# HEPATITIS B

## General Information



### Who is at risk?

Although anyone can get hepatitis B, some people are at greater risk, such as those who:

- Have sexual contact with an infected person
- Have multiple sex partners
- Have a sexually transmitted disease
- Are men who have sexual contact with other men
- Inject drugs or share needles, syringes, or other drug equipment
- Live with a person who has chronic hepatitis B
- Are infants born to infected mothers
- Are exposed to blood on the job
- Are hemodialysis patients

### What is hepatitis?

“Hepatitis” means inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis is most often caused by one of several viruses, such as hepatitis A virus, hepatitis B virus, or hepatitis C virus. Toxins, bacterial infections, certain drugs, other diseases, and heavy alcohol use can also cause hepatitis.

### 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 — 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.

**The best way to prevent hepatitis B is by getting vaccinated.**

### How common is hepatitis B in the United States?

The number of acute hepatitis B virus infections has been declining each year, with an estimated 46,000 new infections in 2006. Many experts believe this decline is a result of widespread vaccination of children. However, up to 1.4 million people may have chronic hepatitis B, many of whom are unaware of their infection.

### How is hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B is usually spread when blood, semen, or another body fluid from a person infected with the hepatitis B virus enters the body of someone who is not infected. This can happen through sexual contact with an infected person or sharing needles, syringes, or other drug-injection equipment. Hepatitis B can also be passed from an infected mother to her baby at birth.

Hepatitis B is not spread through breastfeeding, sharing eating utensils, hugging, kissing, holding hands, coughing, or sneezing. Unlike some forms of hepatitis, hepatitis B is not spread by contaminated food or water.



### Can hepatitis B be spread through sex?

Yes. In the United States, hepatitis B is most commonly spread through sexual contact. The hepatitis B virus is 50–100 times more infectious than HIV and can be passed through the exchange of body fluids, such as semen, vaginal fluids, and blood.

