

Living Well with Hepatitis B Virus Infection

How can I prevent the spread of hepatitis B virus (HBV)?

The hepatitis B virus (HBV) is usually spread by exposure to blood or body fluids from a person living with hepatitis B.

There are vaccines available to prevent HBV infection. The hepatitis B vaccine is provided free to babies as part of their routine childhood immunizations. For more information, see [HealthLinkBC File #105 Diphtheria, Tetanus, Pertussis, Hepatitis B, Polio and Haemophilus influenzae type b \(DTaP-HB-IPV-Hib\) Vaccine](#).

The vaccine is also provided free to those born in 1980 or later and to specific at-risk groups, such as sexual and household contacts of someone living with HBV. For more information, see [HealthLinkBC File #25a Hepatitis B Vaccine](#).

If you have been diagnosed with an acute or chronic HBV infection, you can reduce the chance of passing this virus to others by doing the following:

- Talk to your health care provider if you are pregnant as there is a risk of passing the virus on to your baby. This risk can be greatly reduced by giving your baby hepatitis B immune globulin (HBIG) and the first dose of the hepatitis B vaccine series at birth. Antiviral medications may be recommended for you before you give birth to further reduce the risk of passing the virus to your baby. Breastfeeding is safe for your baby if your nipples aren't cracked or bleeding
- Do not share drug snorting, smoking or injection equipment such as straws, pipes, cookers, filters, water, needles and syringes
- Practice safer sex. Using a condom every time you have sex will help to reduce the risk of HBV and other sexually transmitted infections. For more information, see [HealthLinkBC File #08o Preventing Sexually Transmitted Infections \(STIs\)](#)

- Encourage your sex partner(s) and people you live with to get tested for HBV; if they do not have the virus, they should receive the HBV vaccine
- Never donate your blood, semen, body organs or tissues
- Tell your health care provider if you have ever donated or received blood products or tissue transplants
- Do not share razors, toothbrushes, dental floss, nail files, or other personal care items or medical devices that could have tiny amounts of blood on them
- Keep all open cuts and sores bandaged until healed
- Put articles stained with your blood in a separate plastic bag before disposing them into household garbage – for example, bandages, tissues, tampons, razors, or dental floss
- Use a bleach solution to clean areas of your home or personal items that could have blood on them. Mix 9 parts water to 1 part bleach. For more information, see [HealthLinkBC File #97 Contact with Blood or Body Fluids: Protecting Against Infection](#)
- Advise anyone who has been exposed to your blood or body fluids that you are living with HBV. Depending upon the type of exposure and their immunization history they may need to have blood tests and may require hepatitis B vaccine and/or HBIG. Immunization can reduce the risk of HBV infection if the person is susceptible. If the exposure involves unprotected sexual contact or contact with a person's broken skin or mucous membranes of the eyes, mouth or nose they should visit a health care provider as soon as possible and preferably within 48 hours

How is hepatitis B virus not spread?

HBV is **not** spread by

- Casual contact, such as in an office setting or school
- Coughing or sneezing

- Physical contact such as hugging and kissing
- Using the same dishes or cutlery or sharing meals
- Breastfeeding, unless the nipples are cracked and bleeding
- The healthy skin of others coming into contact with your body fluids such as saliva, urine, feces or vomit

How does hepatitis B virus affect people?

Adults and children 5 years of age and over may have symptoms which include nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, extreme tiredness, fever, loss of appetite, and jaundice or yellowing of the skin. Most children under 5 years of age and adults with weakened immune systems do not have any symptoms.

Most adults will clear the virus and recover completely. Less than 5 percent of healthy adults will develop chronic HBV infection whereas most infants infected at birth will develop chronic infection. This long-term infection may lead to scarring of the liver, called cirrhosis. Cirrhosis can lead to liver failure and/or cancer in a small number of people. You should talk to your health care provider about being screened for liver cancer if you have chronic HBV infection.

Is there treatment for hepatitis B?

There is no treatment for acute hepatitis B. Chronic hepatitis B infection can be treated with medicines that can slow down the progression of liver injury and reduce the chance of liver cancer, but there is no cure.

See your health care provider regularly to determine how your liver is functioning and determine if you need treatment.

What can I do to stay as healthy as possible if I am living with HBV?

- Avoid alcohol as it increases the liver damage caused by HBV
- It is important to manage your HBV infection and take good care of your health. HBV should not be a barrier to employment
- Get more information about HBV from your health care provider, local health unit, support groups, or the Canadian Liver Foundation at www.liver.ca

- See your health care provider regularly, usually about twice a year
- Check with your health care provider before taking any new medicines or vitamins, including over the counter and herbal medicines. Avoid ibuprofen
- Get tested for HIV, hepatitis C virus and other sexually transmitted infections. For more information see <https://smartsexresource.com> and <https://getcheckedonline.com>
- Get the hepatitis A vaccine if you are not already immune. The vaccine is free for people living with hepatitis B. For more information, see [HealthLinkBC File #33 Hepatitis A Vaccine](#)
- Get the pneumococcal polysaccharide vaccine and then get a booster dose of the vaccine 5 years later. For more information, see [HealthLinkBC File #62b Pneumococcal Polysaccharide Vaccine](#)
- Get the influenza vaccine every year. The vaccine is free for people living with hepatitis B and is usually available in October. For your best protection you should get the vaccine as soon as it is available. For more information, see [HealthLinkBC File #12d Inactivated Influenza \(Flu\) Vaccine](#)
- Eat healthy, nutritious food as outlined by the Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide. See www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/canada-food-guides.html for more information
- Get regular exercise
- Avoid smoking. For information about quitting smoking, please see [HealthLinkBC File #30c Quitting Smoking](#)
- If you inject drugs, you can reduce your risk of acquiring hepatitis B and other blood borne pathogens by not sharing drug use supplies and using sterile supplies with every injection. For information about managing substance use, visit HeretoHelp www.heretohelp.bc.ca or call 310-6789 for free, 24 hour support
- If you use drugs, visit Toward the Heart <http://towardtheheart.com> for information about overdose recognition, prevention, and B.C.'s Take Home Naloxone Program



BC Centre for Disease Control
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