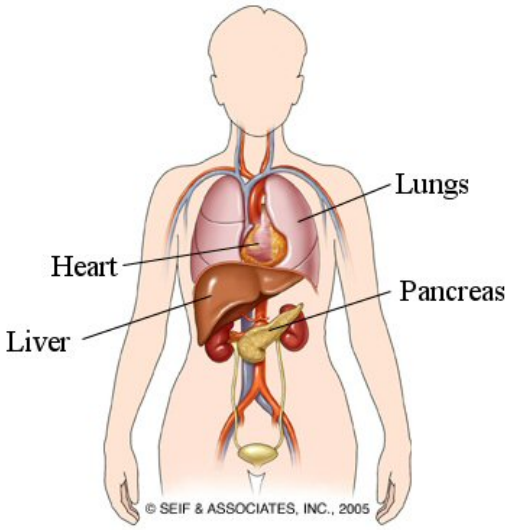
Hepatitis B FAQ's

WHAT IS HEPATITIS B?

Hepatitis B is a liver disease caused by a virus. This virus can stay in your body for many years. Some people have no symptoms and do not get sick. Some people may get scarring (*cirrhosis*) of the liver. This may lead to liver failure. If your liver fails it may not be able to do its usual jobs which are to:

- Help fight infection.
- Help your blood clot when you are bleeding.
- Take wastes and poisons out of your blood.



HOW DOES HEPATITIS B SPREAD?

It is spread when a person's blood or body fluids come in contact with the blood or body fluids of an infected person. Common ways in which hepatitis B is spread are:

- Having unprotected sex with an infected person.
- Getting blood or blood products (plasma, red cells) infected with hepatitis B.
- Getting an organ donation from an infected person.
- Sharing needles with an infected person.
- Sharing razors, nail clippers or toothbrushes with an infected person.
- Being born to an infected mother.

Hepatitis B is *not* spread by:

- Shaking hands, hugging or kissing.
- Breastfeeding.
- Sharing food, silverware or drinking from the same glass.
- Coughing or sneezing.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF HEPATITIS B?

- Some patients have no symptoms!
- During the first months of infection, some people notice:
  - Feeling tired and weak.
  - Not wanting to eat.
  - Feeling sick to your stomach.
  - Throwing up.
  - Fever.
  - Dark pee.
  - The whites of the eyes and the skin may be yellow.
  - Light-colored poop.
- After many months or years of infection some people may still have no symptoms. Some people may notice:
  - Skin rashes.
  - Hurting in the joints.
  - Feeling tired.
  - Swelling of the legs or belly.

HOW IS HEPATITIS B TREATED?

There are no specific medicine or treatments for hepatitis B. You can help take care of your liver by:

- Not drinking alcohol (beer, wine or liquor).
- Eating a healthy diet (check with a dietitian).
- Getting enough rest and sleep.

- Checking with your doctor before taking any medicines, herbs, or food supplements.
- Keeping your appointments and taking your medicine the right way.

Your doctor may have your blood checked to see if you should take an antiviral medicine. A medicine called interferon alpha is sometimes used. It may improve liver function and may relieve some symptoms. If your liver is badly damaged, you may need a liver transplant.

WHAT IF I AM PREGNANT?

- Most babies born to hepatitis B infected mothers do not become infected if the baby gets vaccinated after being born.
- You should not breastfeed your baby if your nipples are cracked or bleeding.

HOW CAN I KEEP FROM SPREADING HEPATITIS B?

- **Do not** share needles, razors, nail clippers, toothbrushes, etc.
- **Do not** donate blood, body organs or any other body parts or fluids.
- Keep any cuts and sores on your body covered with bandages.
- Have safe sex by using or having your partner use a condom.

WHAT OTHER SPECIAL THINGS DO I NEED TO KNOW?

- Get vaccinated against hepatitis A.
- Ask your doctor if family members need to get the hepatitis B vaccine.

Easy-to-Read style based on content from Parkland Health & Hospital System, Dallas, Texas

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