

Hepatitis B - sexual health contacts

Description:

Hepatitis is inflammation of the liver. Hepatitis can be caused by alcohol, some drugs and chemicals, and by infection. Hepatitis B is one form of hepatitis. It is caused by the Hepatitis B virus. Hepatitis B is one of the most serious types of hepatitis. Hepatitis B is one of the most common sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in the world.

Symptoms:

Most children and up to half of the adults with hepatitis B have no symptoms at the time they are first infected. They do not get sick and they do not develop the yellow colour (jaundice) associated with liver disease. Others do get sick and some are very unwell and may need to be admitted to hospital.

The early signs of infection include:

- pain in the abdomen
- nausea
- vomiting
- weakness and tiredness
- loss of appetite
- general aches and pains
- fever.

This may be followed by:

- skin and whites of the eyes start to look yellow (jaundice)
- urine may become dark in colour
- faeces (stools) can be pale-coloured.

Treatment:

Blood tests can be taken to check for hepatitis B. Blood tests show if a person has had hepatitis B in the past, has an acute infection, or has chronic infection. Tests of the liver can also show if there is any damage to the liver.

If you find out that you have hepatitis B close contacts including sexual contacts may need to be tested. This is to see if they are infected and to prevent further spread of the infection. If you feel uncomfortable or embarrassed about telling your partner or partners, the doctor, nurse or health worker can contact them. This is a confidential process and your name will not be mentioned.

There is no cure for hepatitis B. People with acute hepatitis B are advised to:

- rest
- drink plenty of fluids
- avoid fatty/oily foods
- avoid alcohol
- go back to their doctor for check-ups so tests can be done to make sure the liver gets better and the infection clears.

There are treatments available for chronic hepatitis B. People with chronic hepatitis B may be referred to specialist liver doctors to discuss treatment choices. People with chronic Hepatitis B need to be monitored regularly as there is a risk of developing liver cirrhosis, and hepatocellular carcinoma. People with chronic Hepatitis B are advised to:

- limit or avoid alcohol
- maintain a healthy well balanced diet
- get adequate rest
- have regular liver check ups with your GP and or specialist.

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Health Outcome:

People with hepatitis B:

- must not donate blood, semen, or organs
- should inform their doctor, dentist and other relevant health workers of their hepatitis B status
- should contact their recent sexual partners and close contacts and advise them to have a sexual health check.

Prevention:

There is a reliable and safe vaccine available to prevent the spread of hepatitis B.

People who should be tested for hepatitis B and vaccinated if not immune include:

- men who have sex with men
- sex workers
- injecting drug users
- health care workers
- people with hepatitis C
- childcare workers
- people with HIV
- sexual partners of people with hepatitis B
- men and women who have a lot of sexual partners
- men and women who have been sexually assaulted.

Injecting drug users should also take the following precautions:

- always use sterile needles, syringes and equipment
- never share injecting equipment
- dispose of equipment in solid, puncture proof and sealed containers to reduce risk of needle stick injury to others
- never recap needles.

Practicing safe sex means taking care not to exchange body fluids during sex. All people with more than one sexual partner (or whose partner has more than one sexual partner) are at risk of getting an STI like hepatitis B.

- Practise safe sex. Always using condoms when you have vaginal or anal sex is the best way to reduce your risk of hepatitis B. Using water-based lubricant with condoms is recommended. If you are giving a man oral sex (his penis in your mouth), then he will need to wear a condom. It does not matter whether you are male or female, if you put your mouth in contact with your partners anus or vulva while having sex, you will need to use a dental dam.

Help and Assistance

For more information on Hepatitis B, you can talk to:

- your local doctor
- your local sexual health clinic
- your local family planning clinic
- your local public health unit.

Other Resources

[Queensland Health Sexual Health website](#)

Related Content

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[Hepatitis A fact sheet](#)

[Hepatitis B and immunisation fact sheet](#)

[Hepatitis C fact sheet](#)

[Safe Sex fact sheet](#)