

# PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET

## Hepatitis B



### Burlington County Health Department

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**Public Health**  
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Burlington County Health Department  
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### What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a liver infection caused Hepatitis B virus, HBV for short. Some people who get infected never get rid of the virus. They stay infected for life, and can spread HBV to others. Long term infection of HBV can lead to cirrhosis (scarring of the liver tissue and liver failure) and liver cancer.

### How is Hepatitis B spread?

HBV is spread when blood or body fluids from an infected person enters the body of a person who is not immune. HBV is spread through having sex with an infected person without using a condom, sharing needles when using drugs, through needle sticks or sharps exposure on the job or from an infected mother to her baby during birth. It cannot be spread by sneezing, coughing, hugging, kissing, sharing eating utensils, breast feeding, or casual contact.

### What are the symptoms?

Symptoms vary by age; most children under the age of 5 years and newly infected adults who have a weak immune system usually do not show symptoms. About 30%-50% of people aged 5 years and younger do show symptoms. Symptoms usually last for several weeks but can continue up to 6 months. When present, regardless of age, symptoms can include:

- Fever
- Tiredness
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark urine
- Clay-colored bowel movements
- Joint pain
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin)

### How is Hepatitis B treated?

For acute HBV (short term infection that goes away), no medication is available.

For people with chronic (life-long) HBV infection, antiviral medications are available. These medicines keep the virus from developing and growing. People with chronic HBV will need regular checkups to prevent liver damage.

The risk of HBV becoming chronic, or lifelong, varies according to age. Children are at the greatest risk of developing chronic HBV. Approximately 90% of infants and 25%-50% of children aged 1-5 years who become infected with HBV, will remain chronically infected. However, 95% of adults who become infected will recover and do not become chronically infected.

## What if I am pregnant?

HBV can be spread to your baby during birth, but this can be prevented. Pregnant women should be tested for Hepatitis B. If you are positive for the virus, you should be sure that your baby gets a shot called H-BIG and the first dose of hepatitis B vaccine within 12 hours of birth. Your baby should get the second dose of Hepatitis B vaccine at 1 or 2 months old and the third dose at 6 months old. Your baby should get a blood test at 9-15 months to be sure they are protected.

## Who is at risk?

The following populations are at increased risk of becoming infected with Hepatitis B:

- Person with multiple sex partners or diagnosis of a sexually transmitted disease
- Men who have sex with men
- Sexual contact of infected persons
- Injection drug users
- Household contacts of chronically infected persons
- Infants born to infected mothers
- Infants/children of immigrants from areas with high rates of HBV infection
- Health care and public safety workers
- Hemodialysis patients

## Is there a vaccine for Hepatitis B?

Yes, a Hepatitis B vaccine is available. It is a series of 3 shots given over a 6 month period. It is recommended that every person be vaccinated for Hepatitis B. Immunization of all infants beginning at birth is recommended. Children entering school in New Jersey are required to be vaccinated for Hepatitis B.

## How can I prevent hepatitis B?

The Hepatitis B vaccine is the best protection.

Other prevention methods include:

- If you are having sex, but not with one steady partner, use latex condoms correctly and every time you have sex.
- If you are pregnant, you should get a blood test for Hepatitis B. Infants born to HBV-infected mothers should be given H-BIG (Hepatitis B immune globulin) and vaccine within 12 hours after birth.
- Never share needles, syringes, water, or “works”
- Do not share personal care items that might have blood on them (razors, toothbrushes).
- Consider the risk if you are getting a tattoo or body piercing. You might get infected if the tools have had someone else’s blood on them or if the artist or piercer does not follow good health practices.
- If you have or have hepatitis B, do not donate blood, organs, or tissue.
- If you are a health care or public safety worker, get vaccinated against Hepatitis B and always follow universal precautions and safely handle needles and other sharps.

## Where can I get more information?

- Your doctor, nurse or clinic
- The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at: <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hbv>
- The Burlington County Health Department at (609)265-5533
- The New Jersey Department of Health(NJDOH) at 1-800-624-2377 or on the NJDOH Website at <http://www.nj.gov/health/>