

# Hepatitis A

## What is hepatitis?

Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. The liver is a vital organ that processes nutrients, filters the blood, and fights infections. When the liver is inflamed or damaged, its function can be affected. Heavy alcohol use, some medications, toxins, and certain medical conditions can cause hepatitis.

Hepatitis is most often caused by a virus. In the United States, the most common types of viral hepatitis are hepatitis A, hepatitis B, and hepatitis C. Although all types of viral hepatitis can cause similar symptoms, they are spread in different ways, have different treatments, and some are more serious than others.

### Hepatitis A

Hepatitis A is a contagious liver infection caused by the hepatitis A virus. Hepatitis A can be prevented with a vaccine. People who get hepatitis A may feel sick for a few weeks to several months but usually recover completely and do not have lasting liver damage.

In rare cases, hepatitis A can cause liver failure and even death; this is more common in older people and in people with other serious health issues, such as chronic liver disease.

## How common is hepatitis A?

Since the hepatitis A vaccine was first recommended in 1996, cases of hepatitis A in the United States have declined dramatically. Unfortunately, in recent years the number of people infected has been increasing because there have been multiple outbreaks of hepatitis A in the United States. These outbreaks have primarily been from person-to-person contact, especially among people who use drugs, people experiencing homelessness, and men who have sex with men.

## How is hepatitis A spread?

The hepatitis A virus is found in the stool and blood of people who are infected. The hepatitis A virus is spread when someone ingests the virus, usually through:

### → Person-to-person contact

Hepatitis A can be spread from close, personal contact with an infected person, such as through having sex, caring for someone who is ill, or using drugs with others. Hepatitis A is very contagious, and people can even spread the virus before they feel sick.

### → Eating contaminated food or drink

Contamination of food with the hepatitis A virus can happen at any point: growing, harvesting, processing, handling, and even after cooking. Contamination of food and water happens more often in countries where hepatitis A is common. Although uncommon, foodborne outbreaks have occurred in the United States from people eating contaminated fresh and frozen imported food products.

**Hepatitis A can be prevented with a safe and effective vaccine.**



## Vaccination is the best way to prevent hepatitis A.

The hepatitis A vaccine is safe and effective. The vaccine series usually consists of 2 shots, given 6 months apart. Getting both shots provides the best protection against hepatitis A.

### Hepatitis A vaccination is recommended for:

- All children at age 1 year
- Travelers to countries where hepatitis A is common
- Family and caregivers of adoptees from countries where hepatitis A is common
- Men who have sexual encounters with other men
- People who use or inject drugs
- People with chronic or long-term liver disease, including hepatitis B or hepatitis C
- People with clotting factor disorders
- People with direct contact with others who have hepatitis A
- People experiencing homelessness

## You can prevent infection even after you have been exposed.

If you have been exposed to the hepatitis A virus in the last 2 weeks, talk to your doctor about getting vaccinated. A single shot of the hepatitis A vaccine can help prevent hepatitis A if given within 2 weeks of exposure. Depending upon your age and health, your doctor may recommend immune globulin in addition to the hepatitis A vaccine.

## Handwashing plays an important role in prevention.

Practicing good hand hygiene—including thoroughly washing hands with soap and warm water after using the bathroom, changing diapers, and before preparing or eating food—plays an important role in preventing the spread of many illnesses, including hepatitis A.

## Symptoms

Not everyone with hepatitis A has symptoms. Adults are more likely to have symptoms than children. If symptoms develop, they usually appear 2 to 7 weeks after infection and can include:

- ✓ Yellow skin or eyes
- ✓ Fever
- ✓ Not wanting to eat
- ✓ Dark urine or light-colored stools
- ✓ Upset stomach
- ✓ Diarrhea
- ✓ Throwing up
- ✓ Joint pain
- ✓ Stomach pain
- ✓ Feeling tired

Symptoms usually last less than 2 months, although some people can be ill for as long as 6 months.

## Diagnosis and treatment

A doctor can determine if you have hepatitis A by discussing your symptoms and taking a blood sample. To treat the symptoms of hepatitis A, doctors usually recommend rest, adequate nutrition, and fluids. Some people will need medical care in a hospital.

## International travel and hepatitis A

If you are planning to travel to countries where hepatitis A is common, talk to your doctor about getting vaccinated before you travel. Travelers to urban areas, resorts, and luxury hotels in countries where hepatitis A is common are still at risk. International travelers have been infected, even though they regularly washed their hands and were careful about what they drank and ate.



# HEPATITIS B

## General Information

### What is hepatitis?

“Hepatitis” means inflammation of the liver. The liver is a vital organ that processes nutrients, filters the blood, and fights infections. When the liver is inflamed or damaged, its function can be affected. Heavy alcohol use, toxins, some medications, and certain medical conditions can cause hepatitis. However, hepatitis is most often caused by a virus. In the United States, the most common types of viral hepatitis are Hepatitis A, Hepatitis B, and Hepatitis C.



The only way to know if you have Hepatitis B is to get tested.

### What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B can be a serious liver disease that results from infection with the Hepatitis B virus. **Acute Hepatitis B** refers to a short-term infection that occurs within the first 6 months after someone is infected with the virus. The infection can range in severity from a mild illness with few or no symptoms to a serious condition requiring hospitalization. Some people, especially adults, are able to clear, or get rid of, the virus without treatment. People who clear the virus become immune and cannot get infected with the Hepatitis B virus again.

**Chronic Hepatitis B** refers to a lifelong infection with the Hepatitis B virus. The likelihood that a person develops a chronic infection depends on the age at which someone becomes infected. Up to 90% of infants infected with the Hepatitis B virus will develop a chronic infection. In contrast, about 5% of adults will develop chronic Hepatitis B. Over time, chronic Hepatitis B can cause serious health problems, including liver damage, cirrhosis, liver cancer, and even death.

### How is Hepatitis B spread?

The Hepatitis B virus is spread when blood, semen, or other body fluids from an infected person enters the body of someone who is not infected. The virus can be spread through:

- **Sex with an infected person.** Among adults, Hepatitis B is often spread through sexual contact.
- **Injection drug use.** Sharing needles, syringes, and any other equipment to inject drugs with someone infected with Hepatitis B can spread the virus.
- **Outbreaks.** While uncommon, poor infection control has resulted in outbreaks of Hepatitis B in healthcare settings.
- **Birth.** Hepatitis B can be passed from an infected mother to her baby at birth. Worldwide, most people with Hepatitis B were infected with the virus as an infant.

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 also not spread by contaminated food or water.

### What are the symptoms of Hepatitis B?

Many people with Hepatitis B do not have symptoms and do not know they are infected. If symptoms occur, they can include: fever, feeling tired, not wanting to eat, upset stomach, throwing up, dark urine, grey-colored stool, joint pain, and yellow skin and eyes.

### When do symptoms occur?

If symptoms occur with an acute infection, they usually appear within 3 months of exposure and can last up to 6 months. If symptoms occur with chronic Hepatitis B, they can take years to develop and can be a sign of advanced liver disease.

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## How would you know if you have Hepatitis B?

The only way to know if you have Hepatitis B is to get tested. Blood tests can determine if a person has been infected and cleared the virus, is currently infected, or has never been infected.

## Who should get tested for Hepatitis B and why?

CDC develops recommendations for testing based upon a variety of different factors. Here is a list of people who should get tested. The results will help determine the next best steps for vaccination or medical care.

**All pregnant women** are routinely tested for Hepatitis B. If a woman has Hepatitis B, timely vaccination can help prevent the spread of the virus to her baby.

**Household and sexual contacts of people with Hepatitis B** are at risk for getting Hepatitis B. Those who have never had Hepatitis B can benefit from vaccination.

**People born in certain parts of the world** that have increased rates of Hepatitis B. Testing helps identify those who are infected so that they can receive timely medical care.

**People with certain medical conditions** should be tested, and get vaccinated if needed. This includes people with HIV infection, people who receive chemotherapy and people on hemodialysis.

**People who inject drugs** are at increased risk for Hepatitis B but testing can tell if someone is infected or could benefit from vaccination to prevent getting infected with the virus.

**Men who have sex with men** have higher rates of Hepatitis B. Testing can identify unknown infections or let a person know that they can benefit from vaccination.

## How is Hepatitis B treated?

For those with acute Hepatitis B, doctors usually recommend rest, adequate nutrition, fluids, and close medical monitoring. Some people may need to be hospitalized. People living with chronic Hepatitis B should be evaluated for liver problems and monitored on a regular basis. Treatments are available that can slow down or prevent the effects of liver disease.

## Can Hepatitis B be prevented?

Yes. The best way to prevent Hepatitis B is by getting vaccinated. The Hepatitis B vaccine is typically given as a series of 3 shots over a period of 6 months. The entire series is needed for long-term protection.

## Who should get vaccinated against Hepatitis B?

All infants are routinely vaccinated for Hepatitis B at birth, which has led to dramatic declines of new Hepatitis B cases in the US and many parts of the world. The vaccine is also recommended for people living with someone infected with Hepatitis B, travelers to certain countries, and healthcare and public safety workers exposed to blood. People with high-risk sexual behaviors, men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs, and people who have certain medical conditions, including diabetes, should talk to their doctor about getting vaccinated.

## For more information

Talk to your doctor, call your health department, or visit [www.cdc.gov/hepatitis](http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis).