



# HEPATITIS B

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## What is it?

- Hepatitis B is a virus that affects the liver.

## Signs and Symptoms

- Fatigue, fever, malaise (general discomfort and weakness)
- Jaundice (yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyeballs)
- Dark urine
- Pale stools
- Abdominal (stomach) pain, nausea, vomiting, poor appetite

## How do you get it?

- Hepatitis B is found in infected blood, semen, and vaginal fluids.
- A mother who carries Hepatitis B can pass it on to her baby during pregnancy or childbirth.
- There are several possible ways you may become infected:
  - Sex with an infected person
  - Sharing any equipment for injecting or snorting drugs such as needles, straws, rolled up bills, crack pipes, etc.
  - Getting tattoos or body piercings where equipment is not properly sterilized
  - Blood contact and/or needle stick injuries (i.e. healthcare workers)

## Treatment

- Some antiviral treatments are available but can only be administered by specialized doctors. Be sure to speak to your doctor about the need to see a specialist.

## Complications

- About 90% will recover from the virus. Their immune system develops antibodies to fight the infection. While they are fighting the infection, they can still pass it to others.
- Some people (9%) will carry the virus forever, and some may develop liver damage, cirrhosis, liver cancer.
- Very few people (1%) will die soon after getting the virus.

## Prevention

- **GET THE HEPATITIS B VACCINE.** Check with your doctor or Health Unit to see if you qualify for a free Hepatitis B vaccine. See the fact sheet Hepatitis B Vaccine.
- Practice safer sex; always use a condom during sexual intercourse.
- Never share needles or other equipment for injecting drugs or steroids.
- Never share tools for snorting drugs (e.g. straws, rolled up bills, crack pipes, etc.).
- Do not touch blood or body fluids without wearing gloves.

- Ensure you are only using tattoo and body piercing businesses that are inspected and that sterilize equipment and do not re-use needles.

**Hepatitis B is a reportable disease and must be reported to the Local Medical Officer of Health under the Health Protection and Promotion Act.**