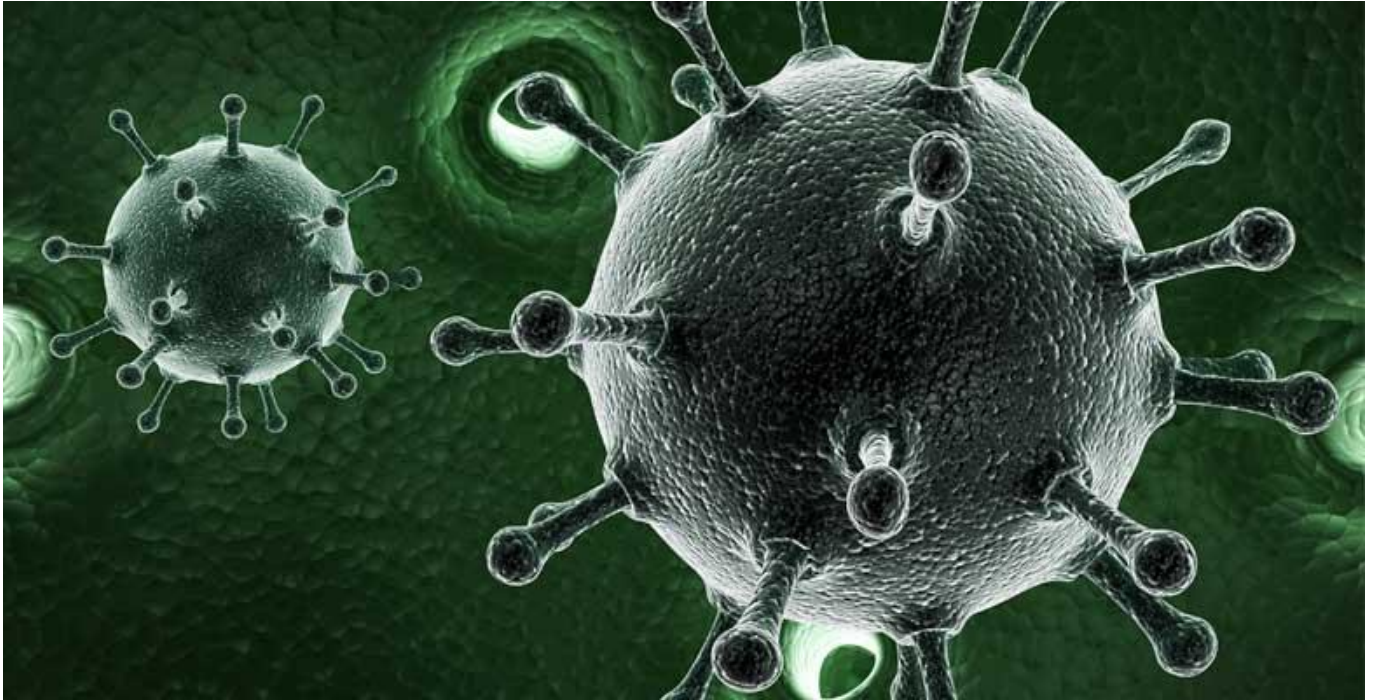


Hepatitis B symptoms & treatment



FAST FACTS

- Hepatitis B is found in infected blood, semen and vaginal fluids.
- It's a sexually transmitted infection (STI) that can be passed on through having sex without a condom or sharing sex toys with someone who has hepatitis B (even if they don't have symptoms); using contaminated needles and syringes or other items with infected blood on them; or from a pregnant woman to her unborn baby.
- Hepatitis B can be prevented by practising safer sex including using male and female condoms, dental dams and latex gloves; never sharing needles and syringes; and avoiding unlicensed tattoo parlours and acupuncturists; and/or having a hepatitis B vaccination (high risk groups and infants).
- A simple blood test carried out by a healthcare professional will show whether you have hepatitis B.
- Most people don't need treatment for *acute* hepatitis B. If it develops into *chronic* hepatitis B, treatment is available to reduce the risk of further complications, such as liver damage.

If you've had unprotected sex, or you're worried about hepatitis B or other STIs, get tested as soon as possible – even if you don't have any symptoms.

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B – hep B or HBV – is part of a group of hepatitis viruses that causes inflammation of the liver – which is when your liver becomes swollen and painful.

Is hepatitis B serious?

Hepatitis B can be serious and, without appropriate treatment and care, can cause liver disease and liver cancer leading to death.

How do you get hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B can be passed on very easily and you can get it if you:

- have unprotected sex (sex without a condom or dental dam), including vaginal, anal and oral sex with someone who has hepatitis B (even if they don't have symptoms).
- share sex toys that aren't washed or covered with a new condom each time they are used.
- are fingering, rimming or fisting – exploring your partner's anus (bottom) with your fingers, mouth or tongue; touching used condoms and sex toys that have been in someone else's anus (bottom).
- share contaminated needles and syringes during recreational drug use.
- are exposed to unsterilised tattoo, body-piercing or medical/dental equipment (occasionally you can get it from sharing a towel, razor blades or a toothbrush if there is infected blood on them).
- are a pregnant woman with hepatitis B you can pass the virus on to your unborn baby.

Hepatitis B, HIV and sexual health

- Having an STI, including hepatitis B, increases your risk of getting HIV. This is because most STIs cause sores or lesions that make it easier for HIV to enter the body.
- Because they are passed on in similar ways, some people have both viruses, which is known as co-infection.
- People with both viruses are more likely to develop chronic hepatitis B, and their liver can get damaged more quickly.
- If you're living with HIV and also have hepatitis B, your viral load is likely to increase because your immune system is weaker. This will make you more likely to pass on HIV if you have sex without a condom.
- If you're living with HIV, your healthcare professional should give you regular hepatitis B tests and regularly check your liver.
- If you're taking antiretrovirals, it's important to discuss with your doctor how treatment for hepatitis B may interact with your HIV drugs.

If you're living with HIV or at risk of HIV, for example, if you're a man who has sex with men, sell sex or use drugs, ask your healthcare professional if you should have a hepatitis B vaccination.

If you're worried about HIV infection, find out everything you need to know in our [HIV Transmission and Prevention section](#)

How do I protect myself against hepatitis B?

- Practise safer sex:
 - Know the status of any sexual partner.
 - Use a new male or female condom or dental dam every time you have vaginal, anal or oral sex.
 - Use a new dental dam or latex gloves for rimming and fingering (exploring your partner's anus with your fingers, mouth or tongue) or use latex gloves for fisting.
 - Cover sex toys with a new condom and wash them after use.
 - Never share needles and syringes or other items that may be contaminated with blood, such as razors, toothbrushes and manicure tools (even old or dried blood can contain the virus).
 - Only have tattoos, body piercings or acupuncture in a professional setting, and ensure that new, sterile needles are used.
 - Have the hepatitis B vaccine (where available) if you are in a high-risk group (for example, you inject drugs, are a sex worker, are a man who has sex with men, change partners frequently, are in close contact with someone who has chronic hepatitis B, or your occupation exposes you to the virus, for example, a nurse). This immunisation is also recommended for infants born to mothers who have the virus and people living with HIV.

Note – apart from condoms, other types of contraception – such as the contraceptive pill offer no protection against sexually transmitted infections.

Ask your healthcare professional if you need further advice on how to protect yourself and your partner(s) from HIV and other STIs.

What do hepatitis B symptoms look like?

Many people with hepatitis B don't have any symptoms. If you do get symptoms you may not notice them until two or three months after infection and they will last up to three months. There can be two stages of infection: *acute* and *chronic*.

For women and men acute (or short-term) symptoms include:

- flu-like symptoms, including tiredness, fever and aches and pains
- feeling and/or being sick
- loss of weight/appetite
- [diarrhoea](#)
- [tummy \(abdominal\) pain](#)
- jaundice, meaning your skin and the whites of your eyes turn yellow
- dark urine (pee)

- pale faeces (poo).

For people who can't fight off the infection (for example, babies, young children and people with a weakened immune system because of HIV) the virus can move to the chronic stage. This is when people are at higher risk of liver failure, liver disease and cancer of the liver, but may be unaware of the dangers as symptoms can take years to develop.

Can I get tested for hepatitis B?

Yes - a simple blood test carried out by a healthcare professional will show whether you have the virus. You may also be given extra tests to see if your liver is damaged.

If you've got hepatitis B you should be tested for other STIs. It's important that you tell your recent sexual partner/s so they can also get tested and treated. Many people who have hepatitis B don't notice anything wrong, and by telling them you can help to stop the virus being passed on; and it can also stop you from getting the infection again.

How is hepatitis B treated?

There is no specific treatment for *acute* hepatitis B, and most people recover within one to two months. Usually, you can manage symptoms at home with painkillers if necessary. Your healthcare professional should advise you to have regular blood tests and physical check-ups. Most people make a full recovery from acute hepatitis B.

If you develop *chronic* hepatitis B you'll be given treatment to reduce the risk of permanent liver damage and liver cancer. Treatment does not cure chronic hepatitis B and most people who start treatment need to continue on it for life.

Whether you have symptoms or not, don't have sex until your healthcare professional says you can.

Once you've had acute hepatitis B, you're immune - which means you can't get it again - but you can get other types such as hepatitis A and C.

Complications of hepatitis B

- As with most STIs, hepatitis B puts you at risk of other STIs, including HIV.
- Without treatment a pregnant woman with hepatitis B can pass it on to her unborn baby.
- Without treatment, chronic hepatitis B can cause scarring of the liver (cirrhosis), which can cause the liver to stop working properly; a small number of people with cirrhosis develop liver cancer; and these complications can lead to death. Other than a liver transplant, there is no cure for cirrhosis. However, treatments can help relieve some of the symptoms.



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