



HEPATITIS B AND THE HEPATITIS B VACCINE INFORMATION

Hepatitis B is a liver disease caused by the Hepatitis virus. Anyone can get Hepatitis B, but those who are at greatest risk include:

- Certain household contacts of an infected person
- Certain health care workers who have contact with infected blood
- Persons who work in centers for persons with developmental disabilities
- Drug users who share needles
- Homosexuals, especially those with multiple sex partners
- People who have been incarcerated and individuals who work with them

Hepatitis B virus can be found in the blood, and to a lesser degree in saliva, semen and other bodily fluids of an infected person. It is spread by direct contact with infected body fluids, usually by a needle stick injury, sharing needles or sexual contact. Hepatitis B is not spread by casual contact or by respiratory droplets.

The symptoms may appear 2 to 6 months after exposure, but usually within 3 months. The symptoms of Hepatitis B include fatigue, poor appetite, fever, vomiting, and occasionally joint pain or rash. Urine may become darker in color and a yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes may appear.

Some individuals may experience few or no symptoms. Chronic carriers are at increased risk of cirrhosis of the liver and liver cancer.

The Hepatitis B virus can be found in the blood and other bodily fluids several weeks before symptoms appear and generally persist for several months afterward. About 10 percent of infected people may become long-term carriers of the virus, and may remain contagious, even though they do not present any symptoms whatsoever.

There is no specific medical treatment or antibiotic that can be used to treat a person once symptoms appear. Usually bed rest is required.

In many cases, receiving the Hepatitis B vaccine can best prevent Hepatitis B. The Hepatitis B vaccine is administered intramuscularly in a series of three injections given at set intervals; at the first visit, one month later and then 6 months after the first injection. To obtain the highest degree of effectiveness, the series of three injections should be completed.

Health care providers will determine if an individual is a candidate for the vaccine.