

# Newsletter

## HEPATITIS B

Compiled by: Lancet Laboratories SA

### Understanding what Hepatitis B is?

Hepatitis B is inflammation of the Liver due to an infection with the Hepatitis B virus. The severity of the disease can range from a mild illness lasting only a few weeks (called acute infection), to a lifelong, serious (and potentially deadly) illness (called chronic infection.)

### How common is Chronic Hepatitis B?

- Chronic Hepatitis B is known to be a global problem.
- More than 250 million people are chronically infected with Hepatitis B virus.
- Chronic infection causes more than 650 000 deaths each year. Approximately 2.5 million people in South Africa have chronic Hepatitis B.

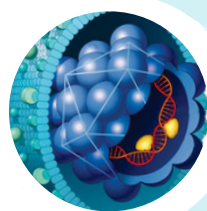
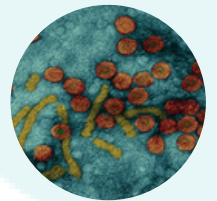
### How likely is it that acute Hepatitis B will become chronic?

- The likelihood depends on the age at which a person becomes infected.
- The younger a person is when they are infected with Hepatitis B virus, the greater the chance that the infection will become chronic.
- Approximately 90% of infants who are infected around the time of birth will develop chronic infection.
- The risk decreases as you get older, dropping to around 5% if you are infected as an adult.

### How is Hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B virus is spread when blood, semen or other body fluids infected with the virus, enters the body of an uninfected person. Potentially hazardous activities include:

1. Having unprotected sex with an infected partner.
2. During birth. (When the virus spreads from the mother to her baby.)
3. Exposure to blood through needle sticks or other injuries caused by sharp instruments.
4. Sharing drug-injection equipment such as: needles and syringes. (Including sharing infected needles for acupuncture, piercings and tattooing.)
5. Sharing items such as Toothbrushes or Razors with an infected person
6. Direct contact with the blood or open sores of an infected person.
7. The majority of adults who are infected with Hepatitis B virus will develop symptoms, while the majority of young children do not.



### Symptoms of acute Hepatitis B include:

- Fever
- Tiredness
- Loss of appetite, Nausea and Vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Dark Urine and lighter (clay-coloured) faeces
- Yellow discoloration of the skin and eyes (called jaundice)

These symptoms usually last for a few weeks, but some people may feel ill for as long as 6 months. People with chronic Hepatitis B usually do not have any symptoms but over time they can develop serious Liver problems, including scarring of the Liver (called Cirrhosis) and Liver cancer.

### How can I avoid giving Hepatitis B to other people?

If you have Hepatitis B infection you can reduce your chances of giving Hepatitis B to other people through the following:

- Discuss the infection with any sexual partners and use a condom during all sexual encounters.
- Do not share anything that may have blood on it, including razors and toothbrushes.
- Do not donate blood, sperm or any organs.
- Cover open cuts, scratches and sores.
- Clean blood spills immediately with detergent or bleach.
- Make sure your immediate family and household contacts, get tested to see if they need to be vaccinated against Hepatitis B.
- You can participate in all activities, including contact sports.
- Children with Hepatitis B should not be isolated from other children and can attend School and Daycare.

### How will I know if I have Hepatitis B?

Talk to your healthcare provider if you are worried that you have Hepatitis B. They will do a blood test to check if you are infected. Chronic Hepatitis B is diagnosed when tests show that the virus remains in the body for more than 6 months.

### How is acute Hepatitis B treated?

Most people who are infected with Hepatitis B as adults will recover spontaneously, no specific medication against Hepatitis B virus is needed. During these few weeks you should ensure that you drink plenty of water and eat healthy foods. You should avoid anything that will put more strain on your Liver, for example: Alcohol.

### How is chronic Hepatitis B treated?

Not every person with chronic hepatitis B needs to be on medication. Your healthcare provider will monitor you regularly to check for signs of Liver disease. This may include regular blood tests, an ultrasound of the liver and even taking a small piece of the Liver (called a Biopsy) for testing.

Hepatitis B virus is NOT spread by:  
food, water, sharing eating utensils,  
coughing, sneezing, hugging,  
kissing, holding hands or breast  
feeding.

