



Hepatitis B

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a very contagious, incurable sexually transmitted infection (STI) caused by a virus. 50% of people who are infected with Hepatitis B do not show symptoms, but they are still contagious to other people. However, Hepatitis B is also a reportable infection. This means sexual partners must be notified if you test positive for Hepatitis B. When a person is infected, it causes an “acute” infection, which can then lead to a “chronic” infection

What is an “Acute Infection”?

When a person is first infected with Hepatitis B, it is labeled as an acute infection. This acute infection stage lasts no longer than 6 months. Most people (90%) experience no symptoms and the body will eventually fight off the virus.

Symptoms *may* include:

- Nausea
- Little appetite
- Pain in the abdomen
- Yellowing skin
- Strange colour of urine or stool
- Other flu-like symptoms

Although a person may have no symptoms, they are still able to pass on the virus unknowingly if not tested.

What is a “Chronic Infection”?

A chronic infection occurs when the infection lasts longer than 6 months. With a chronic infection, a person becomes a “carrier” of Hepatitis B, meaning they will have the virus for life and be able to spread it to others.

A person *may or may not* experience symptoms.

If there are symptoms, a person may experience them within 45 – 180 days of the infection turning chronic. Over time, the virus can cause major damage to the liver, and can even risk a person’s life.

How Do You Contract Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is passed through bodily fluids, including semen, vaginal fluids, saliva, urine or blood. It can be spread during any type of contact (sexual or other) in which there is contact with infected bodily fluids. Hepatitis B can also be spread through sharing personal items, such as toothbrushes, razors, needles or tattoo equipment. Also, a pregnant individual can pass this to their baby before birth.

How Long Will It Take for Symptoms to Appear?

If there are symptoms, they will generally show 1 – 4 months after a person contracts the infection.

Remember: Like all other STI's, there are generally no symptoms for Hepatitis B. **If you are sexually active, take care of your health and get tested!**

When Should I Be Tested for Hepatitis B?

If you are sexually active, you should be screened for STI's on a yearly basis. If you have been having multiple sexual partners, you will want more testing – ask a health professional about the frequency in which you should be tested. However, you should be tested if you suspect or know a sexual partner is a carrier of Hepatitis B, if you have shared any personal items with someone who you are unsure of their sexual history, or if you have travelled outside of Canada and The United States to countries where Hepatitis B is present (ie. Asia, Africa, South America, the Pacific Islands, Eastern Europe, and the Middle East).

How Do You Test for Hepatitis B?

Testing for Hepatitis B is done through blood work. A sample of your blood will be taken through a needle and then examined at a laboratory. The blood will be screened for antigens and antibodies that indicate an infection of Hepatitis B.

What Happens If I Test Positive for Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a reportable infection, which means that the Local Health Authorities will have to be alerted that you tested positive along with your sexual partner (s) past and present.

How Do I Talk to My Partner About Hepatitis B?

If you currently have a partner, open communication is the key. You should learn about the virus together and its risks and use protection at all times.

How Can I Protect Myself from Hepatitis B?

Although there is no cure for Hepatitis once you are infected, there is a vaccine against Hepatitis B available that will last a lifetime. Ask your doctor about getting vaccinated.

Safer Sex Practices to Help Protect You and Your Partner(s) Against Hepatitis B:

- **Vaginal Sex (including sex toys):** Latex external (penis) condom, non-latex external condom **OR** internal (vaginal) condom. Use lubricant!
- **Oral Sex (Penis):** Non-lubricated external (penis) condom (with water-based lubricant used on penis and on outside of condom) **OR** flavoured condom. Lubricated condoms can be used but may leave an unpleasant taste.
- **Oral Sex (Vagina or Anus):** Dental dam. *Please see Planned Parenthood's pamphlet on Dental Dams for more info on how to make and use these correctly!*
- **Anal Sex (including sex toys):** Latex external (penis) condom **OR** non-latex external (penis) condom. Use lubricant!
- **Mutual Masturbation:** Washing hands after masturbating your partner and before touching your own mouth and/or boxer short area.

If you would like further information on Hep B, STIs, testing and/or safer sex practices, please feel free to drop by our Centre or contact us by phone or email. If you want to see a doctor for confidential STI testing, please call us to make an appointment.

Sexual Health Questions? We Have Answers!

Location:

47 St. Clare Avenue, St. John's, NL, A1C 2J9

Hours:

Monday: 9am - 4:30pm

Tuesday: 9am - 4:30pm

Wednesday: 9am - 4:30pm

Thursday: 12pm – 6:00pm

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Revised: July 2020