

Hepatitis B

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a disease caused by a virus that attacks the liver. It is 100 times easier to be infected with Hepatitis B as compared to HIV. About 90% of adults clear the virus from their system after infection.

What are the signs of Hepatitis B?

- 30% have no signs or symptoms
- tiredness, fever, joint pain,
- pain in the stomach area,
- loss of appetite, nausea,
- dark-colored urine and light-colored stools,
- yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice),
- it can take from six weeks to six months after the virus enters the body to experience any symptoms.

How is Hepatitis B spread?

Hepatitis B is spread from an infected person to another by blood, semen or vaginal fluid. Therefore, it is passed through:

- intimate sexual contact, such as oral, vaginal, anal sex
- sharing needles, “rigs” or snorting straws
- poking yourself accidentally with a used needle
- tattoos, piercings
- sharing razors, toothbrushes
- from a mother to her newborn infant at the time of birth.

Where and how can I get tested?

A blood test can be ordered by your family doctor or Public Health through Sexual Health Centres (in Saint John 643-7404) .

Treatment:

There is treatment available for certain people with chronic Hepatitis B.

Complications:

- Most people (90%) infected with Hepatitis B recover completely and develop lifelong protection to the virus
- 10% will become chronic carriers
- 15-40% of the chronic carriers will have liver damage and liver disease such as cirrhosis or cancer of the liver

How to protect yourself from Hepatitis B?

- The best way to protect yourself from Hepatitis B is to get the vaccine (needle shots). In New Brunswick, since 1995, Hepatitis B is part of the regular baby vaccines. People with Hepatitis C can also get the vaccine free.
- Use condoms every time you have sex and make sure you use them correctly.
- Use only new needles if you inject drugs.
- Needle exchange is available at AIDS Saint John located at 15 Hazen St in Saint John.
- Do not share personal items such as toothbrushes and razors
- For tattoo and piercing only go to professionals who use new needles and sterilized equipment.
- Pregnant women are routinely tested.

For further information, contact your public health office in Region 2 call 658-5188 or 643-7404.

Sites for the Public Health agency of Canada:

http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hcai-iamss/bbp-pts/hepatitis/hep_b_e.html

