

Hepatitis B

Overview

Hepatitis B is a liver infection caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). Hepatitis B is transmitted when blood, semen or other body fluid from an infected person enters the body of someone who is not infected. This can happen through sexual contact; sharing needles, syringes, or other drug-injection equipment; or from mother to baby at birth. For some people, hepatitis B is an acute, or short-term, illness but for others, it can become a long-term, chronic infection. Risk for chronic infection is related to age at infection: approximately 90 percent of infected infants become chronically infected, compared with two to six percent of adults. Chronic hepatitis B can lead to serious health issues, like cirrhosis or liver cancer.

The rates of acute hepatitis B in the United States have declined by approximately 82 percent since 1991. At that time, routine hepatitis B vaccination of children was implemented and has dramatically decreased the rates of the disease in the United States, particularly among children. In the United States, the CDC estimates that 850,000-2.2 million persons have chronic hepatitis B.

Hepatitis B in Florida

In 2016, Florida reported 5,681 cases of hepatitis B. Six percent of acute, or new, hepatitis B infections are in individuals under age 30 that should have been vaccinated. Similarly, 14 percent of chronic hepatitis B cases are in individuals aged under 30 years that should have been vaccinated.

Who should be tested for HBV?

- Sexually active persons with multiple sex partners
- Persons using street drugs
- Household contact with a HBV-positive person
- Persons with HCV, HIV/AIDS or other chronic diseases
- All pregnant women

Modes of Transmission

The hepatitis B virus (HBV) is found in blood/body fluids, and can be spread by:

- Sharing injection drug or tattooing equipment
- Unprotected anal, vaginal or oral sex
- Infected mother to her infant during delivery
- Household contact of an infected person
- Occupational exposure through needle stick

Symptoms

The incubation period for hepatitis B is six to 24 weeks, with an average of eight to 12 weeks.

Acute Hepatitis B

Most children and many adults who contract hepatitis B usually have no symptoms, however, if present, symptoms are similar to the symptoms of hepatitis A:

- Yellow skin or eyes (jaundice)
- Feeling very tired
- Abdominal pain
- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Diarrhea

Chronic Hepatitis B

Chronic hepatitis B refers to an infection where the body is not able to eliminate the virus. About 90 percent of those infected by hepatitis B as children and two to six percent of those infected as adults will develop chronic hepatitis B, which may lead to cirrhosis and cancer of the liver.

Vaccination

The best way to prevent hepatitis B is by getting vaccinated. The hepatitis B vaccine is typically given as a series of three shots over a period of six months. The entire series is needed for long-term protection.

- Persons having unprotected sex—especially with multiple partners
- Inmates in long-term correctional facilities
- Persons with hepatitis C (HCV), HIV/AIDS, diabetes or other chronic diseases
- All infants (CDC-recommended since 1992; currently a requirement for admission into kindergarten in Florida)
- All 7th grade students (CDC-recommended since 1997)

Treatment

There is no medication available to treat acute hepatitis B. During this short-term infection, doctors usually recommend rest, adequate nutrition and fluids. Some people may need to be hospitalized.

People with chronic hepatitis B virus infection should seek the care of a doctor who specializes in treating hepatitis B. Patients should be monitored regularly for signs of liver disease and evaluated for possible treatment. Several medications have been approved for hepatitis B treatment, and new drugs are in development. However, not every person with

chronic hepatitis B needs to be on medication, and the drugs may cause side effects in some patients.

Perinatal Hepatitis B

The Florida Perinatal Hepatitis B Prevention Program (PHBPP) is committed to the prevention of perinatal HBV infection. For more information, visit:

<http://www.floridahealth.gov/diseases-and-conditions/perinatal-hepatitis-b/index.html>

References

1. Sexually Transmitted Diseases Treatment Guidelines 2015: MMWR 2015:64(No3)
2. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: www.cdc.gov/hepatitis
3. Immunization Action Coalition: <http://www.immunize.org>