

Hepatitis B: Brief Summary

Hepatitis B is a liver infection caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV). Hepatitis B is transmitted when blood, semen or other body fluids 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.

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.

All infants are routinely vaccinated for hepatitis B at birth, which has led to dramatic declines of new hepatitis B cases in the U.S. and many parts of the world. The vaccine is also recommended for people living with someone infected with hepatitis B, travelers to certain countries, and health care and public safety workers exposed to blood. People with high-risk sexual behaviors, men who have sex with men, people who inject drugs, and people who have certain medical conditions, including diabetes, should talk to their doctor about getting vaccinated.

Treatment

For those with acute hepatitis B, doctors usually recommend rest, adequate nutrition, fluids, and close medical monitoring. Some people may need to be hospitalized. People living with chronic hepatitis B should be evaluated for liver problems and monitored on a regular basis. Treatments are available that can slow down or prevent the effects of liver disease.

Rates

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. The five-year average in Florida for *acute* hepatitis B cases is 365, and for *chronic* hepatitis B it is 4,494.