HEPATITIS B
The Facts
Hep B and Your Liver

Your liver keeps you healthy in many ways. It removes toxins from your blood and transforms nutrients from food into energy.

Hepatitis means inflammation of the liver. There are different types of hepatitis. Hepatitis B (Hep B) is caused by a virus that infects the liver.

If you have Hep B, you are not alone.

1.25 million people in the United States have Hep B.

100,000 people living in New York City have Hep B.

The Hep B virus can be passed from one person to another through infected blood, semen and vaginal fluids, for example:

- During birth (an infected mother can pass Hep B to her newborn). This can be prevented through medical care.
- By having unprotected sex (without a condom) with an infected person.
- By sharing personal care items (razors, toothbrushes).
- By sharing needles or injection equipment (for insulin, drug use, steroids, tattooing or acupuncture).
Stages of Hep B

**Acute Hep B** is a new infection. Most healthy adults who get Hep B fight off the infection and get rid of the virus without treatment within six months. If you fight off Hep B during the acute stage, you become immune for life.

**Chronic Hep B** is an ongoing or lifelong infection that develops when the body can’t get rid of the virus. People who have a developing immune system (infants and children under 5) or people with a weak immune system (such as people with HIV or cancer) are most likely to develop chronic infection.

**Hep B Symptoms**

Many people with Hep B do not have symptoms and do not know they are infected. Symptoms of Hep B can take up to 30 years to develop. When symptoms do appear, they are often a sign of advanced liver disease.

Signs and symptoms of Hep B can include fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, dark urine, grey-colored stools, joint pain, jaundice and more.
Risks of Chronic Hep B

About one in four people with chronic Hep B develop serious liver damage, including scarring and fibrosis (moderate liver damage) and cirrhosis (severe liver damage).

Liver damage often happens slowly, over 20 to 30 years.

People with chronic Hep B are at risk for liver cancer at any stage of the disease, and should be screened for liver cancer every six months.

Hep B and Liver Health Tests

Your doctor may perform some of these tests to confirm that you have Hep B or to find out how Hep B is affecting your health:

Blood Tests

- **Hep B Surface Antigen (HBsAg) Test**: Shows if you are infected with Hep B.
- **Hep B Surface Antibody (anti-HBs) Test**: Shows if you are immune to Hep B.
- **Hep B DNA Tests**: Shows the amount of Hep B virus in your blood.
- **Liver Function Tests (LFTs)**: Measure how well the liver is working. High levels may mean you have liver inflammation or damage.
Liver Ultrasound/Fibroscan®
Non-invasive imaging tests that look for liver damage by providing a picture of the shape, size or stiffness of the liver.

Liver Biopsy
Removal of a small piece of liver tissue with a needle. The tissue is checked under a microscope for damage or disease.

Liver Cancer Screening Tests
Blood tests and ultrasound are recommended for adults with Hep B every six months.

You are immune to Hep B if:

- You were infected with Hep B in the past but cleared the virus.
- You were successfully vaccinated. Some people do not develop immunity to Hep B even after completing the Hep B vaccine series. Ask your doctor if you should get tested to see if the vaccine worked for you.

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**What You Should Do**

- You are infected with Hep B and should see a Hep B doctor.
- You are immune to Hep B and don’t need to do anything.
- You are not immune to Hep B and may need to receive three doses of the Hep B vaccine for protection.
If You Have Hep B

Get Care with a Doctor Who Knows About Hep B

Even if you feel healthy, Hep B may be damaging your liver. Go to a Hep B doctor to check your liver health.

Ask your doctor:

• Is my liver healthy?  
  Do I have liver damage?
• Should I take vaccines for other diseases such as Hep A or the flu to protect my health?
• What is the best weight, diet and exercise routine for me?
• What is the best care for my Hep B?
• Should I get screened for liver cancer?
• Is it safe for me to take my medicines (including over-the-counter medicines), herbs, vitamins and supplements?
• Should I take Hep B antiviral treatment?

Find Out If You Should Be Treated

People with chronic Hep B should speak with their doctor to find out if treatment is needed. Right now, there is no cure for chronic Hep B, but Hep B antiviral treatment can slow or stop the virus from damaging the liver.
If You Are on Hep B Treatment: Take your medications as prescribed so that the virus does not become resistant to the medication. If the virus becomes resistant, the medications won’t work.

Talk with your doctor about concerns you may have taking Hep B medication if you are pregnant or breastfeeding. Do not stop taking your medications without speaking with your doctor.

Protect Your Health

It is safest for your health not to drink alcohol at all. Alcohol damages the liver. Avoiding alcohol can protect your liver. Learn tips for cutting down at rethinkingdrinking.niaaa.nih.gov.

If you need help cutting down on alcohol, speak with your health care provider or call 311.

Ask your doctor before taking over-the-counter medications, natural medications, vitamins or supplements. Some over-the-counter medications such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), vitamins, supplements such as iron, herbs or “natural drugs” can be dangerous for your liver. Tell all of your doctors that you have Hep B so they can help you avoid medications that may harm your liver.

Obesity can lead to fatty liver, which can make Hep B worse. Eat a healthy diet, exercise and maintain a healthy body weight.

Get support. Share your feelings with your doctor and people you trust. If you need help managing your feelings, speak with your health care provider or call 311.
Pregnancy and Hep B

All pregnant women should get tested for Hep B during each pregnancy. **If you are pregnant and have Hep B, tell the doctor and staff in the delivery room.** To prevent Hep B, your newborn must receive one shot of Hep B vaccine and one shot of Hep B immune globulin immediately after birth, and no later than 12 hours after delivery.
Children and Hep B

Can my child get infected with Hep B?
Yes. Babies are at risk of getting Hep B at birth if their mother has Hep B. Infection can be prevented if the baby gets the vaccine and immune globulin on the day of birth.

Should my child be vaccinated against Hep B?
Yes. Children are at risk of getting Hep B if they live with or are cared for by a person who has Hep B. Vaccination is the best way to prevent Hep B.

- All newborns should receive the first dose of the Hep B vaccine (the birth dose) before leaving the birthing facility.
- All children should complete the basic Hep B vaccine series.

Should my child get tested for Hep B?
If you are a mother with Hep B, your child must be tested for Hep B after completing the Hep B vaccine series. The testing should be completed at 9 months of age (not earlier).

If your child has Hep B, you don’t have to tell teachers, daycare providers, other children or their parents.

- You cannot spread Hep B to your baby through your breast milk, unless there is blood present.
- Do not share food that has been in your mouth. Do not pre-chew food for babies.
Telling Others that You Have Hep B

Living with Hep B may not be easy. Telling others that you have Hep B can help you manage your feelings and get the support you need.

Because you can pass Hep B to others close to you, you should also tell them so that they can get tested or vaccinated.

You don’t have to tell everyone that you have Hep B. But it’s important to tell sex partners, people in your household, drug-sharing partners and all of your doctors.

There are free online services (such as inspot.org) that let you send an anonymous email to encourage a contact to get tested.

**What should I say?**

Give as much information as you can. Be confident and calm when you discuss the topic, and avoid blaming.

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**Be sure to tell people:**

- Hep B can be spread to others during childbirth, during sex and by sharing drug use equipment or personal care items (such as razors).
- Get tested to find out if you have Hep B or need the vaccine. There is a safe and effective vaccine against Hep B.
Protecting Others from Hep B

- **Use condoms during sex** until your partner is fully vaccinated against Hep B. Your partner should be tested for Hep B and receive the vaccine if needed.

- **If you inject drugs, only use new or sterile equipment or works** such as needles, syringes, cotton, cups, ties, razors, cutters, rinse water, cookers, straws or pipes.

- **Make sure that new or sterile needles are always used** for tattooing, acupuncture or injection (for example, insulin, steroid, etc.).

- **Encourage people who you live with, sex partners and people who you have shared drugs or needles with to get tested** and vaccinated if necessary.

- Do not share personal care items such as toothbrushes, razors, needles, nail files, nail clippers, nail scissors or washcloths that may have touched your blood.

- Cover cuts and open sores with bandages, and make sure others do not touch your blood. Wash hands well after touching your blood or body fluids.

- Clean up any blood spills with a bleach solution (one part bleach and nine parts water).

- Do not donate blood, organs, tissue or sperm.

**Post-Exposure Prophylaxis:** If someone you know was recently exposed to Hep B, call a doctor right away and ask about Hep B immune globulin, a medication that can help stop the virus from spreading in the body. It must be taken within seven days after being exposed to be effective.
Casual Contact Is Safe

You **cannot** spread Hep B through sneezing, coughing, kissing, hugging, shaking hands or talking, or by sharing eating utensils, drinking glasses, food or drinking water. You should not be excluded from work, school, play or childcare if you have Hep B.
Information & Resources

More Information about Hep B

New York City Department of Health
Call 311 or visit nyc.gov/health/hepatitis

Hepatitis B Foundation
English: Call 215-489-4900 or visit www.hepb.org
Chinese: hepb.org/simplifiedchinese
French: hepb.org/french
Korean: hepb.org/korean
Spanish: hepb.org/spanish

American Liver Foundation
Call 800-465-4837 or visit liverfoundation.org

NYC Hep B Coalition
Visit hepfree.nyc

Find a Doctor Near You

New York City Department of Health
Visit nyc.gov/health/hepatitis or text LIVER to 877877

Low-Cost Hep B Medical Care at New York City Public Hospitals
Visit nyc.gov/hhc

Find Health Insurance

New York State of Health Marketplace
Call 855-355-5777 or visit nystateofhealth.ny.gov
Chinese: https://info.nystateofhealth.ny.gov/simplifiedchinese
French: info.nystateofhealth.ny.gov/French
Korean: info.nystateofhealth.ny.gov/Korean
Spanish: info.nystateofhealth.ny.gov/Spanish

ACCESS NYC
Visit https://access.nyc.gov/
Hep B Risk Assessment

☐ Were you or your parents born in an area with a high rate of Hep B? (See list on next page.)

☐ Are you pregnant?

☐ Do you live with someone who has Hep B?

☐ Does your sexual partner have Hep B?

☐ Did your mother have Hep B when you were born?

☐ Do you have abnormal liver tests and don’t know why?

☐ Have you been told you have hepatitis?

☐ Have you ever been told you have HIV?

☐ Are you a man who has sex with men?

☐ Have you ever injected drugs or shared any drug use equipment (such as needles, cookers, cotton, straws or rinse water)?

If you answered “yes” to any of these questions, you are at risk for Hep B. Talk to your doctor about getting tested, or text LIVER to 877877 for more information.
Areas of the World Where Hep B Is Common

Africa and Asia: All countries

Australia and South Pacific: All countries except Australia and New Zealand

Middle East: All countries except Cyprus and Israel

Eastern Europe: All countries except Hungary

Western Europe: Malta, Spain and indigenous populations in Greenland

North America: Alaska Natives and indigenous populations in Northern Canada

Central America: Guatemala and Honduras

South America: Ecuador, Guyana, Suriname, Venezuela and Amazonian areas of Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia and Peru

Caribbean: Antigua-Barbuda, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts-Nevis, St. Lucia and Turks and Caicos Islands
For more info, visit [nyc.gov/health/hepatitis](nyc.gov/health/hepatitis) or text LIVER to 877877