

# HEPATITIS B



## WHAT IS IT?

Hepatitis B is a virus that infects the liver. It is the most common serious liver infection in the world. The virus is transmitted through blood and body fluids.

Less than 5% of adults who get acute hepatitis B develop chronic hepatitis, which can lead to cirrhosis (liver scarring) and/or cancer of the liver later in life.

A person with acute hepatitis B or who is a carrier can spread the hepatitis virus to other people through his/her blood and other body fluids or by sexual contact. Hepatitis B is not spread by casual contact.

## WHO IS AT RISK OF GETTING HEPATITIS B?

- Babies born to mothers who are hepatitis B carriers
- Sexual partners of hepatitis B carriers
- Other people living in the same household as a carrier
- Injection drug users
- People whose occupation involves increased exposure to blood and body fluids (ie healthcare workers)
- People who live in or travel to parts of the world where hepatitis B is common. It is most usually contracted in these areas through sexual contact.

## HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF AND OTHERS

- Get vaccinated – 3 doses of the vaccine are required to provide immunity
- All children in Ontario are offered this vaccine at grade 7 level in a 2 dose vaccination program
- Practice safer sex – use condoms
- Be certain that hepatitis B screening is part of pre-natal care
- Tell your doctor, dentist, health care worker if you are infected with the hepatitis B virus
- Never share toothbrushes, razors or personal items that might contain traces of blood
- Never donate blood if you are hepatitis B positive
- Cover all cuts and sores
- If you are hepatitis B positive, clean up spills of blood with freshly diluted household bleach (1 part bleach to 10 parts water). Let stand for 10 minutes before wiping up.

The good news is that there is a simple blood test to see if you have been exposed to hepatitis B. All children in Ontario are eligible to receive the hepatitis B vaccine through the Vaccine Preventable Disease Program with your local health unit. This vaccine has been given since 1994.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact the Health Unit at 1-800-660-5853 or visit [www.healthunit.org](http://www.healthunit.org)

Interesting web site: [www.liver.ca](http://www.liver.ca)

Source: Canadian Liver Foundation  
Public Health Agency of Canada