

HEPATITIS B SCREENING PATIENT INFORMATION CARD



WHAT IS HEPATITIS B?

Hepatitis means swelling, or “inflammation,” of the liver. There are many different causes of liver inflammation. When liver inflammation is caused by infection with a virus, it is called *viral hepatitis*. There are a number of viruses that can cause viral hepatitis. Hepatitis B is one of them.

Some people who get infected with hepatitis B can develop a long-term infection in the liver called *chronic hepatitis B*. Chronic hepatitis B is serious because it is one of the main causes of liver cancer and cirrhosis, especially in Asians and Pacific Islanders.^{1,2}

HOW DOES HEPATITIS B SPREAD?

Hepatitis B can be spread through contact with infected blood or body secretions.³ For example:

- Women with hepatitis B can pass the virus to their infants during birth. This is how most Asian Americans with hepatitis B are infected
- You can also get hepatitis B by:
 - Touching the blood or sores of an infected person
 - Having sex with an infected person without using a condom
 - Sharing razors, toothbrushes, or other personal items with an infected person
 - Sharing needles or syringes used to inject drugs
 - Using unsterilized needles or equipment for tattoos, body piercings, or acupuncture

Hepatitis B is NOT spread through:

- Casual contact, for example, shaking hands or hugging

- Coughing or sneezing
- Breastfeeding (unless nipples are cracked or bleeding)
- Sharing eating utensils

WHAT'S INVOLVED IN TESTING?

A simple blood test can determine whether or not you have been infected with hepatitis B. The blood test can also tell whether you need to get vaccinated against hepatitis B infection or not. Your health care provider will need to take a sample of your blood for the test.

WHAT IF I DON'T HAVE THE VIRUS?

If your blood test shows that you *do not have hepatitis B* and you *are not already immune* to it, then you need to be vaccinated. The hepatitis B vaccine will protect you from getting infected with hepatitis B in the future.

If your blood test shows that you *did have hepatitis B at some time in the past* but your body fought off the infection and you are now immune to it, then nothing more needs to be done. You do not need to get vaccinated.

WHAT'S INVOLVED IN GETTING VACCINATED?

- First, you need to know that the hepatitis B vaccine is safe and effective. More than 1 billion doses of the vaccine have been given around the world.⁴ You can't get hepatitis B from the vaccine. Usually, the most you may feel is some soreness where you got the shot
- Second, the hepatitis B vaccine requires 3 doses given within 6 months. Getting all 3 doses will give

you the highest level of protection against hepatitis B infection.⁵ But if for some reason this isn't possible, talk to your provider. An alternative vaccine schedule may work for you

- Finally, you may be wondering what happens if you miss a dose for some reason. Don't worry; you don't have to start from the beginning. You just have to get the remaining shots you need

Not all providers and health care centers have the hepatitis B vaccine on hand. If your provider or health care center doesn't have the vaccine, you will be directed to another provider or center where you can get vaccinated at low or no cost to you.

WHAT IF I HAVE THE VIRUS?

If your blood tests show that you have *chronic hepatitis B*, your provider will talk with you about the best way for you to stay healthy. Your provider may run additional tests to get a better idea of how your liver is working and how active the hepatitis B virus is in your liver.

It is important to know that most people with chronic hepatitis B don't need treatment right away. But they do need to see their health care provider a few times a year for checkups. This is the best way to detect any changes in your condition.

Your provider may also want you to see another doctor who specializes in treating chronic hepatitis B.

WHAT TREATMENT IS AVAILABLE IF I HAVE THE VIRUS?

For those who do need treatment, we have safe and effective treatments. The treatments help control the virus and lower your risk of future liver damage, such as liver cancer and cirrhosis. There are 7 approved treatments available in the United States.

When it's time to consider treatment, your health care provider will discuss the different options with you so that you can decide together which approach works best for you. Your provider will tell you more about treatment and how often you need to come in for appointments.

It is important to keep appointments with your provider even though you feel well. Your provider needs to see you periodically to help you stay healthy.

HOW CAN I PROTECT MY FAMILY?

The best protection is vaccination.³ Your family members and people who live with you need to get tested for hepatitis B infection and vaccinated if they are not immune.⁶

In addition, if you have chronic hepatitis B, there are certain things you need to do to prevent spreading the hepatitis B virus to your family members or people who live with you.^{3,7}

- Have sexual contacts vaccinated
- Use barrier protection during sexual intercourse if your partner is not vaccinated or immune
- Cover open cuts and scratches with a bandage
- Don't share personal items, for example, toothbrushes or razors
- Clean blood spills with bleach or detergent
- Don't donate blood, organs, or semen

But there are no other limits on the things you can do. You can still play contact sports and share food, water, and utensils. You can participate in all types of social activities involving casual contact.⁷

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5. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Hepatitis B epidemiology and prevention of vaccine-preventable diseases. *The Pink Book*, 12th edition. April 2011. <http://www.cdc.gov/vaccines/pubs/pinkbook/downloads/hepb.pdf>. Accessed April 21, 2012.
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7. Lok A, McMahon B. Chronic hepatitis B update: 2009. *Hepatology*. 2009;50:1-36.