

Hepatitis B, patient information and rules of conduct

County Medical Officers' infection prevention sheet.

Why have I received this information?

A blood test has shown that you have hepatitis B. This leaflet contains information about hepatitis B, and what anyone with hepatitis B needs to keep in mind.

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a virus that infects the liver, blood and certain body fluids (e.g. semen). You can have hepatitis B for a long time without noticing it. Even if you do not have any symptoms, hepatitis B can be highly contagious. After many years of infection, you can develop liver problems.

How is hepatitis B transmitted?

Many people have hepatitis B. According to figures from the World Health Organization (WHO), some 300 million people in the world had hepatitis B in 2019. Most contracted the infection from their mother at birth. Hepatitis B is also transmitted by having sex without a condom. The hepatitis B virus can be transmitted during unprotected sex, whether vaginal or anal, and sometimes even oral sex.

Hepatitis B can also be transmitted through blood, such as if blood containing the hepatitis B virus gets into your blood, onto a mucous membrane, such as in the eye, nose or mouth, or into an open wound. It can also be spread when drug users share syringes, mixing cups or other drug paraphernalia.

Hepatitis B CANNOT be transmitted by socialising with friends, such as by hugging or kissing, or by sharing glasses/plates/cutlery. Nor is it spread by using the same toilet, or by blood coming into contact with unbroken skin.

What should I keep in mind so as not to infect others?

You must follow the **rules of conduct** that your doctor issues to you:

- You must attend follow-up appointments when your doctor contacts you.
- You must inform anyone you intend to have sex with that you have hepatitis B.
- You must use protection/condoms during sex, unless your partner is immune (i.e. unless they have had hepatitis B or have been vaccinated against hepatitis B).
- You must inform dental care and healthcare personnel that you have a blood-borne virus (BBV) when seeking dental or medical care that could result in personnel coming into contact with your blood (e.g. when providing samples or undergoing surgery).
- You must also inform personnel that you have a blood-borne virus if you plan on getting a tattoo, a piercing (including ears), or any other treatment that may cause your skin to bleed.
- Do not share razors or toothbrushes with others.
- If your blood should come into contact with a wound on another person's skin, or with their eyes, nose or mouth, you must inform them that your blood is infected with hepatitis B. Urge them to immediately rinse the area with water. They should contact their local healthcare centre, the nearest infection clinic or 1177 Vårdguiden to receive a free vaccination against hepatitis B as soon as possible.
- If you use syringes or needles, you must not share them with others. Nor may you use shared mixing cups or other drug paraphernalia.
- You are not permitted to donate blood, sperm or eggs.
- Organ and tissue donations for transplantation may be permitted in certain situations.
- Inform your doctor if you have a sexual partner or family member who may need to be vaccinated against hepatitis B.

There is also **hygiene advice** that should be followed in order to avoid infecting others:

- Be sure to cover all wounds with plasters or dressings.
- If someone helps you to change a plaster/dressing, they must wear plastic gloves.
- Any blood-stained material must be carefully packaged before being discarded.
- If you get blood on your clothes, they can be washed in a washing machine.
- Drops of blood on, for example, flooring can be wiped up with materials such as kitchen paper or tissues that can be disposed of. The area should then be thoroughly cleaned with water and detergent.

What should I consider before having sex with a partner?

You must inform your partner that you have hepatitis B. You must also use a condom unless your partner is immune (i.e. they have had hepatitis B or have been vaccinated against hepatitis B).

It is best to take your partner to your doctor/clinic so that they can get a free hepatitis B vaccination before you have sex.

If you have exposed someone to the risk of infection (e.g. by having sex with an unvaccinated person, without a condom), they can also reduce the risk of infection by getting a hepatitis B vaccination (free of charge) after the event. The vaccine is most effective if taken within two days.

How often do I need to visit my doctor for check-ups?

Your doctor will decide how often you need to attend check-up appointments. This is usually once a year, although more frequent checks are sometimes required.

Is having hepatitis B dangerous?

Most people with hepatitis B never develop liver problems, although some people can develop such problems after many years of infection. In the worst-case scenario, people who suffer liver problems can develop cirrhosis or liver cancer.

When you attend regular appointments with your doctor, they will check your liver function and ensure that you get any treatment that is needed.

Is there any treatment for hepatitis B?

Treatment can be provided if necessary. However, most people do not need any treatment. Your doctor will inform you whether you need treatment.

Although treatment is generally non-curative and does not clear the infection, it can reduce the risk of developing liver problems.

Can I become a parent?

Yes. Hepatitis B will not prevent you from having children or becoming a parent. However, it is important that your sexual partner is immune to hepatitis B (e.g. by vaccination) before you try to start a family.

If you become pregnant, there are ways to prevent the hepatitis B virus from being passed on to your child. Sometimes, you can receive hepatitis B treatment during the later stages of pregnancy. The child will be given the hepatitis B vaccine immediately after birth, followed by additional doses of the vaccine on several occasions during their first year. This results in a very low risk of the child becoming infected. If the child is given the vaccinations as planned, they can be breastfed as normal.

Does it affect my choice of work or leisure-time activities?

You can usually work in most fields when you have hepatitis B. If your work entails a risk of cutting yourself and of another person coming into contact with the blood, you should discuss the matter with your doctor. The same applies if you are unsure whether you can study or train for a particular profession. You do not need to inform your employer that you have hepatitis B.

If you want to participate in a sport that may sometimes result in bleeding, speak to your doctor first. Your doctor will decide whether it is okay for you to participate.

Hepatitis B falls under the Communicable Diseases Act. What does this mean?

The Communicable Diseases Act is intended to reduce the risk of certain infections (including hepatitis B) being spread to more people.

If you have hepatitis B, you are entitled to receive the necessary hepatitis B healthcare and treatment for free. You must follow the rules of conduct that your doctor issues to you. You also need to help with contact tracing.

If you have been issued with a rule of conduct that you believe to be wrong, you can request that the County Medical Officer for your region reviews it. However, until such a review has been completed, you must continue to follow the rules issued to you.

Contact tracing – what does this mean?

It is extremely important to find anyone else who has hepatitis B so that they can also have their liver checked and to avoid the spreading of infection to others. Accordingly, if you have hepatitis B, you must inform your doctor about anyone you have had sex with, or have otherwise exposed to the risk of infection (e.g. by sharing syringes or needles), so that they can be informed that they need to be tested for hepatitis B. The information you provide is confidential, and your identity will not be disclosed to the people you name. Your doctor will also ensure that your family and siblings are tested for hepatitis B, provided that they are in Sweden.

Would you like to learn more?

You can find more information about hepatitis B at:

www.1177.se

www.umo.se

www.folkhalsomyndigheten.se