

# PUBLIC HEALTH FACT SHEET



COUNTY MICHIGAN  
HEALTH DIVISION

Department of Health & Human Services

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## Hepatitis B

### What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is swelling and tenderness of the liver, which is caused by the Hepatitis B virus.

### What are the symptoms?

Some people have no symptoms. Adults are more likely to have symptoms than children. Symptoms are abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, tiredness, dark urine, and rashes or aches in joints.

### How is Hepatitis B spread?

The most common ways the disease is spread is through unprotected sexual contact, sharing needles used for injecting drugs or medication and accidental needle sticks among health care workers. The virus is in blood, semen and/or vaginal fluids. When one of these fluids contacts mucous membranes (soft wet surfaces of the body) or enters through breaks in the skin, the virus may be passed to an uninfected person. Mothers can pass it to infants at birth.

### How long after exposure do symptoms begin?

On average symptoms begin three months after the virus enters the body. This time period can range from six weeks to six months.

### How long is a person contagious with Hepatitis B?

Most people are contagious several weeks before symptoms appear, and for as long as the virus is in their body.

### What are the complications of Hepatitis B infection?

Nine out of every ten adults recover without complications. One in ten have Hepatitis B virus in their body for longer than six months. Some have the virus for the rest of their lives. They are called carriers. Infants and small children are very likely to become carriers, if infected. Carriers may develop liver cancer and/or cirrhosis (damage to liver cells). Death occurs in a very small number of active infections.

### Is there a treatment for Hepatitis B?

There is no specific treatment for acute Hepatitis B infection. However, it is important to have a doctor follow the course of the infection. The doctor can recommend symptomatic measures such as rest, change in diet, etc.

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## How can Hepatitis B be prevented?

There are shots to help prevent Hepatitis B infection. They are safe and effective and are routinely given to infants with their baby shots. If you have been exposed to Hepatitis B and have not had the shots, Hepatitis B immune globulin needs to be given immediately. See your doctor.

Ways to protect yourself are:

- Do not use IV drugs and do not share needles (works, etc.).
- Practice safer sex. A mutually faithful relationship with one other person is safest. Use latex condoms if you or your partner have other partners, use IV drugs, are infected with Hepatitis B or other sexually transmitted diseases. Remember condoms reduce but don't eliminate risks of sexually transmitted diseases, including Hepatitis B.
- Avoid direct contact with another person's blood or body fluids. If contact occurs, wash up immediately.
- Don't share toothbrushes, razors, nail clippers or other personal items, which may become contaminated with blood.

**For more information on Hepatitis B, call (248) 858-1406 or toll free 1 (800) 848-5533.**

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