

Auckland Sexual Health Service
Free phone 0800 739 432

What is Hepatitis B?

- Hepatitis is the name given to different illnesses which cause inflammation of the liver.
- Hepatitis B virus is one of a number of viruses which can affect your liver.
- Hepatitis B is common in New Zealand and infection may result in long term health complications

How is Hepatitis B spread?

- You can catch get Hepatitis B by coming in contact with body fluids from infected people such as:
 - Blood
 - Semen
 - Vaginal Fluid
 - Urine
 - Saliva
- This means you can get Hepatitis B by :
 - Sexual Contact:
 - Having vaginal sex without a condom,
 - Anal sex without a condom or
 - Oral sex without a condom.
 - Sharing equipment and needles for:
 - Drugs
 - Tattooing or
 - Body piercing.
 - It may be passed on from mother to baby at birth.
 - Sometimes it can be passed through breast milk.
 - Maybe even living in the same house by:
 - Sharing eating utensils, razors, toothbrushes.
 - It may even possibly be spread by wet kissing.
 - Playing contact sports or some occupations may put you at higher risk of catching hepatitis B.

How do I know if I have Hepatitis B?

- Of the people who come in contact with the virus: 3 out of 4 will not feel sick.
- You can have the infection for up to six months before it will show up in a blood test. During this time you may or may not feel sick.
- Symptoms may include:
 - Nausea
 - Loss of appetite
 - Pain in the liver (right side)
 - Fever
 - Painful joints
 - Jaundice (yellow eyes and skin)

What happens if I catch Hepatitis B?

- Most people who catch the virus recover and become immune to the virus.
- Some people become “carriers” which means they remain infected with the virus and will be infectious to others.
- If you are immune you can’t get Hepatitis B again – or pass it on to anyone.
- If you are a carrier you can remain well but a number of people who are carriers become sick some years later.

How do I avoid being infected with Hepatitis B?

- If your blood test shows that you have not been infected with the Hepatitis B virus there are some simple things you can do.
 - You can be vaccinated against Hepatitis B.
 - Use condoms every time you have vaginal or anal sex.
 - Avoid oral sex if you or your partner has bleeding gums, sores or broken skin.
 - Use new (sterile) needles and syringes if injecting drugs or having tattoos or piercings done.
 - Wear gloves if doing any first-aid or cleaning up spilt blood or body fluids.

Vaccination for Hepatitis B

- If you think you could come into contact with the virus – anytime – and you don’t want to get it, you can be vaccinated.
- A vaccination course will provide protection to about 95% of people. It won’t cure people who already have it.
- You will need to have 3 injections in your arm over 6 months.
- You need to have all 3 injections to be fully protected.
- Side effects are uncommon but may include fever, soreness at the site of injection and muscles aches. These usually settle within 24 – 48 hours.

Hepatitis B vaccination is free for NZ residents at Auckland Sexual Health Service