



Hawaii State Department of Health

Disease Investigation Branch

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Hepatitis B

(Serum Hepatitis)

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is an infection of the liver caused by a virus. Hepatitis B virus (HBV) can cause lifelong infection, scarring of the liver, liver cancer, liver failure and death.

How do you get it?

HBV is spread when blood or other body fluids from an infected person enters the body of someone who is not infected. For example, HBV can be spread through sexual contact, by sharing drugs or needles, through needle sticks or sharps exposures in healthcare settings, or from an infected mother to her baby at birth.

HBV is not spread through food or water, sharing eating utensils, breastfeeding, kissing, coughing, sneezing or by casual contact.

Blood donations are routinely screened for hepatitis B in Hawaii, and those that test positive for hepatitis B are not given to patients.

What are the symptoms of hepatitis B?

A person can be infected with HBV and have no symptoms. Older people are more likely to have symptoms than younger people.

The symptoms include jaundice (yellowing of the skin or whites of the eyes), abdominal pain, nausea, vomiting, tiredness, loss of appetite and dark colored urine. There is usually no fever.

When do symptoms start?

The symptoms usually begin about 3 months after infection with the virus, but the onset may range from 2 to 6 months.

For how long is a person contagious?

Hepatitis B virus is present in the blood and other body fluids of an infected person several weeks

before symptoms start, and the person remains infectious to others for months afterward. If a person becomes a carrier of the hepatitis B virus, they remain potentially infectious to others for life.

What is the treatment for hepatitis B?

There are no medicines available for acute HBV infection. A doctor can prescribe medicines for treatment of chronic HBV infection.

Is there a vaccine for hepatitis B?

Yes. Hepatitis B vaccine is safe and effective. It is given in 3 doses over a period of 6 months. Once the series is complete it provides lifelong protections against hepatitis B. The vaccine is required for school attendance. It is also recommended for persons in high risk groups, such as household members and sexual partners of a person infected with hepatitis B, and for people arriving from or traveling to countries where hepatitis B is common.

How can you keep from getting it?

Get the hepatitis B vaccine.

Use latex condoms correctly every time you have sex.

Do not shoot drugs. If you can't stop, never share drugs, needles, syringes, water or "works", and get vaccinated against HBV.

Do not share personal care items that might have blood on them, such as razors or toothbrushes.

Choose tattoo artists and piercing providers carefully. Make sure they follow hygienic practices.

Persons infected with hepatitis must not donate blood, organs or tissue.

For more information, see the CDC's website at <http://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/index.htm>