

FACT SHEET

HEPATITIS B (HBV)



BRITISH COLUMBIA
CENTRE for EXCELLENCE
in HIV/AIDS

About Hepatitis B

- Hepatitis B is a type of liver disease and one of the most common strains of viral hepatitis.¹
- The virus is spread through contact with contaminated blood and organs, through sexual activity, from mother-to-child, and by sharing personal items with an infected person (e.g. razors, toothbrushes, nail clippers).²
- Within six months of becoming infected, about 90 per cent of adults will clear the virus on their own (acute hepatitis B) and develop lifelong protection against it. The remaining 10 per cent of people who are infected are unable to clear the virus and will become chronic carriers (meaning they are chronically infected and infectious).² Chronic hepatitis can lead to cirrhosis (liver scarring) and/or liver cancer later in life.¹
- For people who experience symptoms, the most commonly reported include jaundice, loss of appetite, abdominal discomfort, dark urine or fatigue.¹
- Hepatitis B is about 100 times more infectious than HIV.²
- Infants, young children and immunocompromised persons are at the highest risk of becoming chronic hepatitis B carriers. Other groups at higher risk of hepatitis B include injection drug users, households with hepatitis B carriers and people at risk of sexually transmitted diseases.³
- According to a recent report released by Statistics Canada on Canadian Trends in Cancer Prevalence, liver rates among males ages 50–79 are significantly higher than in younger age groups or among women of the same age. Liver cancer rates are on the rise because the major causes of primary liver cancer — hepatitis B and hepatitis C — are not being identified and treated early enough.⁴

Prevalence of hepatitis B in Canada

- An estimated 300,000 Canadians are currently infected with hepatitis B virus.⁴
- An estimated 60,000 people in British Columbia are infected with hepatitis B virus.
- A high proportion of hepatitis B carriers in Canada are immigrants from hepatitis B-endemic countries in the Far East, Middle East, Africa, South America, Eastern Europe and Central Asia.³

Diagnosis and Treatment of Hepatitis B

- A blood test is necessary to diagnose hepatitis B.⁵
- Unlike hepatitis C, hepatitis B is a vaccine-preventable disease.²
- Chronic hepatitis B is treatable.²

Hepatitis B vs. Hepatitis C

TRANSMISSION

- People can be infected with hepatitis B through contact with infectious blood, semen, and other bodily fluids, primarily through birth to a mother who has hepatitis B; sexual contact with an infected person; sharing of contaminated needles, syringes or other injection drug equipment; and needlesticks or other sharp instrument injuries.⁶
- People can be infected with hepatitis C through contact with blood of an infected person, primarily through sharing contaminated needles, syringes, or other injection drug equipment; and less commonly, through sexual contact with an infected person, birth to an infected mother, and needlesticks or other sharp instrument injuries.⁶

SYMPTOMS

- At least 30 per cent of serious cases of hepatitis B show no symptoms.⁷ Chronic hepatitis B is a “silent” disease because often no symptoms appear until the liver is severely damaged.¹
- For people who experience symptoms, the most commonly reported include jaundice, loss of appetite, abdominal discomfort, dark urine or fatigue.¹
- The majority of hepatitis C cases show no symptoms.⁷ For people who experience symptoms, the most commonly reported include fatigue, lethargy, reduced appetite, sore muscles and joints, nausea, abdominal pain or jaundice.⁸

VACCINE AND CURE

- Unlike hepatitis B, there is no vaccine for hepatitis C.²
- Chronic hepatitis C, unlike HIV and hepatitis B, can be cured.²

References

- 1 Canadian Liver Foundation. http://www.liver.ca/liver-disease/types/viral_hepatitis/Hepatitis_B.aspx. Accessed January 16, 2013.
- 2 Public Health Agency of Canada. http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hcai-iamss/bbp-pts/hepatitis/hep_b-eng.php. Accessed January 16, 2013.
- 3 Public Health Agency of Canada. <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/cig-gci/p04-hepb-eng.php>. Accessed January 16, 2013.
- 4 Canadian Liver Foundation. http://www.liver.ca/newsroom/press-releases/1-16-2012_Liver_cancer_rates.aspx. Accessed January 16, 2013.
- 5 Public Health Agency of Canada. <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/publicat/std-mts/hepb-eng.php>. Accessed January 16, 2013.
- 6 Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <http://www.cdc.gov/hiv/resources/factsheets/hepatitis.htm>. Accessed January 28, 2013.
- 7 Public Health Agency of Canada. <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hep/index-eng.php>. Accessed January 28, 2013.
- 8 Health Canada. <http://www.healthycanadians.gc.ca/health-sante/disease-maladie/hepc-eng.php>. Accessed January 16, 2013.