

Definition

Inflammation of the liver caused by Hepatitis B virus.

The Hepatitis B virus is a common cause of hepatitis worldwide. It is spread from person to person by contact with infected body fluids such as blood, saliva, semen, and vaginal fluids. It is also transmitted to babies by infected mothers.

Transmission by contaminated blood (e.g., in IV drug abusers) and sexual contact is common.

Incubation Period

Infected individuals are contagious many weeks before the onset of the first symptoms and they remain infectious through the acute clinical course of the disease and during the chronic carrier state (which may persist for years). Blood tests, usually done repeatedly, help determine whether the patient has a chronic infection, is a carrier, or is immune and no longer contagious.

NOTE: Some cases of Hepatitis B are subclinical (not sick enough to seek medical care) and others may have an influenza-like illness but no jaundice (yellowing of the whites of the eyes and the skin)

Symptoms:

- Loss of appetite
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Weakness and fatigue
- Abdominal pain, especially in the area around your liver
- Dark-colored urine
- Jaundice (the yellowing of the skin and the whites of the eyes)
- Joint pain

Clinician: _____

Symptoms of Hepatitis B can range from mild to severe. If you have a mild case of Hepatitis, you may not even realize that you have it. It may not cause symptoms or may only cause symptoms similar to the stomach flu.

If you have a current infection with Hepatitis B— You must visit your physician until you are released from follow-up. The only cure for Hepatitis B is time and your body's defenses.

The "Carrier" State

Most people who are newly infected are able to recover from Hepatitis B. However, between 6% and 10% of people who are first infected as adults become chronic carriers and continue to carry the virus in their blood for the rest of their lives. Many look and feel well and don't know they are infected. Up to half of children infected before age 5 and 90% of babies infected at birth become chronic carriers.

Not only can carriers pass the infection to others throughout their lives, but chronic infection can lead to liver disease, liver failure, scarring (cirrhosis) of the liver and liver cancer.

Management of the Carrier State:

Measures to prevent passage of blood and body fluids to another person are appropriate (e.g. sexual abstinence, condom use, stopping needle sharing, no blood donation, stopping sharing razors and/or toothbrushes, etc.).

Some specialists in treatment of liver disease treat Hepatitis B carriers with an expensive, toxic drug under certain situations. This is a specialized procedure that requires outside referral to a physician who specializes in liver disease.

(Cont. on Back)



Proper Care:

REST at home until you are told you can increase your activities. There is no special DIET. Eat three well-balanced meals a day (the meals may be small until your appetite increases). Do not drink alcohol until you've recovered completely, and your laboratory tests liver function have been normal for over a month. Only take MEDICINES your physician recommends.

Prevention:

The best method of preventing Hepatitis B is immunization. Hepatitis B vaccine is recommended for all persons at risk, such as health care workers (and others in public service exposed to blood and body secretions), men who have sex with men, sexual or household contacts of individuals with Hepatitis B, and drug users who share needles. The immunization requires three injections and provides long-term immunity—at least 9 years. Safer sexual practices, particularly the use of condoms, are also an important way to prevent the sexual transmission of Hepatitis B infection.

SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS: _____

