

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis is a term that means inflammation of the liver. The hepatitis B virus causes hepatitis B. It can start as an acute infection and then become chronic.

Many people living with hepatitis will not develop symptoms, or experience only mild symptoms. If they do develop symptoms, these can include fever, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea, stomach pain, dark urine, and yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice). In acute cases, symptoms appear, on average, 60 to 90 days after exposure to the hepatitis B virus, and can last up to 3 months. While the body typically rids itself of the hepatitis B virus within 6 months, some people who catch infection become chronic carriers of the virus, meaning the virus stays in the body for longer than 6 months.

In fact, the virus can stay in the body for years or a lifetime. Chronic carriers can develop serious liver diseases such as scarring of the liver (cirrhosis) and liver cancer.

How does hepatitis B infection happen?

Hepatitis B virus spreads from person to person, when an infected person's blood or bodily fluids enter another person. This can happen through sharing needles, having sex (especially if unprotected), sharing razors or toothbrushes if they are contaminated with blood, and in other ways. Anyone who is pregnant and has hepatitis B can also pass the virus to their newborn during childbirth.

Hepatitis B immunization is safe and effective.

All provinces and territories have a routine hepatitis B immunization program, given at different times (from birth to Grade 7).



Talk to your doctor, nurse, pharmacist, or local public health office about getting yourself or your child immunized against hepatitis B.