



## Facts At-A-Glance

- ❖ Hepatitis B is a viral infection of the liver caused by the hepatitis B virus (HBV).
- ❖ The hepatitis B virus is transmitted through body fluids such as blood, semen and vaginal secretions.
- ❖ Many hepatitis B patients have no symptoms. When there are symptoms, they may be mild.
- ❖ Most hepatitis B infections are short-term, or acute, and do not cause lasting health problems.
- ❖ In a small portion of cases, hepatitis B persists as a long-term, or chronic, condition that can lead to more serious liver diseases, including cirrhosis, liver failure and liver cancer.
- ❖ About 5 percent of adults infected with hepatitis B develop chronic infection. Up to 90 percent of people infected at birth develop chronic infection.
- ❖ In the U.S., there are 80,000 new cases of hepatitis B infection each year.
- ❖ As many as 1 in 10 Asian Americans have chronic hepatitis B.
- ❖ Hepatitis B can be transmitted from mother to child during childbirth.
- ❖ Once you recover from hepatitis B you cannot get it again.
- ❖ Vaccination is the best way to prevent hepatitis B and is recommended for all infants and children, as well as adults who are at risk of getting infected.

At the American Liver Foundation,  
we are committed to liver health  
and we are here to help you.  
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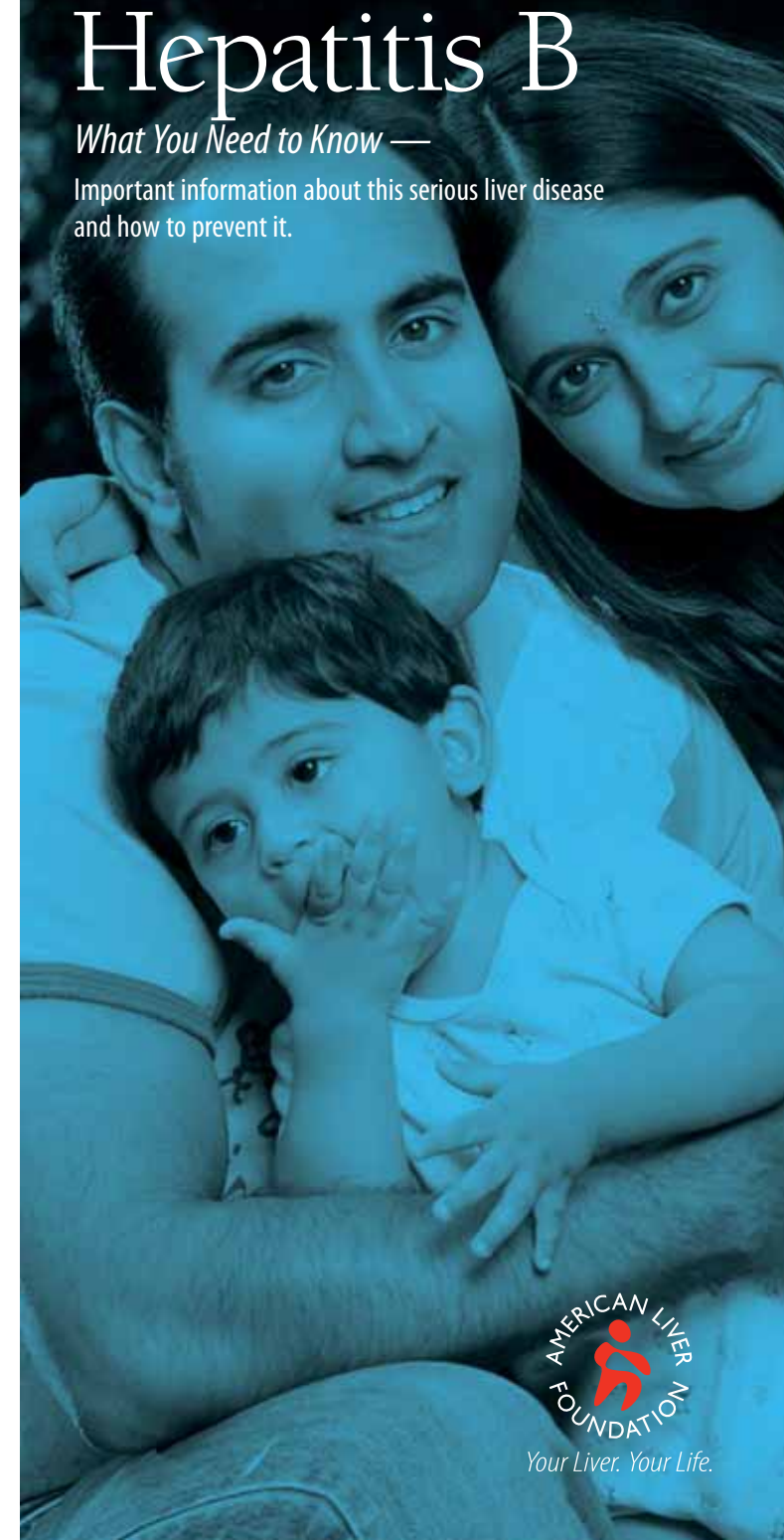
The American Liver Foundation is the nation's leading nonprofit organization promoting liver health and disease prevention. We provide research, education, and advocacy for those affected by liver-related diseases, including hepatitis.

This brochure has been reviewed by Anna Lok, M.D., Professor of Internal Medicine, University of Michigan Medical Center. The American Liver Foundation is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. The data contained in this brochure is provided for information only. This information does not constitute medical advice and it should not be relied upon as such. The American Liver Foundation does not engage in the practice of medicine. The American Liver Foundation, under no circumstances, recommends particular treatments for specific individuals, and in all cases recommends that you consult your physician before pursuing any course of treatment.

# Hepatitis B

*What You Need to Know —*

Important information about this serious liver disease  
and how to prevent it.



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## What causes hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a disease of the liver that is caused by the hepatitis B virus, or HBV. The virus passes from one person to another through body fluids, such as blood, semen and vaginal secretions. The hepatitis B virus can be spread from a mother to her child during birth. Other common causes of transmission include:

- ✚ Sexual contact
- ✚ Sharing needles among intravenous drug users
- ✚ Sharing razors or toothbrushes

## How long does hepatitis B last?

More than 90 percent of hepatitis B patients recover on their own within 6 months with no lasting health problems. This form of the disease is called acute hepatitis B. A minority of patients cannot clear the virus from their bodies and have long-term, or chronic, hepatitis B. This form of the disease can lead to serious complications such as fibrosis, cirrhosis, liver failure and liver cancer.

## What are the symptoms of hepatitis B?

Many people with acute hepatitis B, and most people with chronic hepatitis B, have no symptoms. When symptoms do occur they are often mild and may include fatigue, fever, loss of appetite, nausea, headache, muscle soreness, pain near the liver and jaundice (a yellowing of the skin and whites of the eyes).

## How is hepatitis B diagnosed?

Hepatitis B is diagnosed with a blood test. However, many people never know they have been infected with the hepatitis B virus. This is because they don't have symptoms and the virus is not found in routine blood tests. Some people learn they have the disease, or that they had it in the past, when they volunteer to donate blood. All blood donation centers test for current and past hepatitis B infections and reject anyone who was ever infected with the virus.

## Who is at risk of getting hepatitis B?

Anyone who is exposed to the blood or body fluids of an infected person is at risk of getting hepatitis B. In addition, immigrants from areas where hepatitis B is common, such as Central and Southeast Asia, Africa, and East Europe, are at risk of having chronic hepatitis B infection. Children of immigrants from these regions are also at risk because the virus can be passed from mother to child during birth or from other household members.

## You may also be at risk of getting hepatitis B if you:

- ✚ Are exposed to blood or bodily secretions on the job, as a first aid or emergency worker, firefighter, mortician, embalmer, police officer or health care worker
- ✚ Live in the same household with an infected person
- ✚ Have unprotected sex with an infected person or have more than one sexual partner
- ✚ Inject illicit drugs
- ✚ Have hemophilia
- ✚ Work or are a patient in a health care or long-term care facility
- ✚ Work or are incarcerated in a prison
- ✚ Get a tattoo in unsterile conditions
- ✚ Stay for more than a few months in countries where hepatitis B is common
- ✚ Are a hemodialysis patient

## How is hepatitis B treated?

Medicines are not used to treat acute cases of hepatitis B because the disease usually goes away on its own.

If you have been diagnosed with acute hepatitis B you must see your doctor for follow-up blood tests to make sure your body clears the virus. After the virus has been cleared from your body, you will be protected for life and will never get hepatitis B again.

If you have acute hepatitis B, you should reduce the pace of your daily activities to match any loss of energy. A balanced diet with plenty of fluids is also helpful. Your liver's ability to break down drugs is weakened while you have hepatitis B and alcohol can cause further damage to your liver. Therefore you should not take any drug or herbal supplement unless approved by your doctor, and avoid alcohol.

It is recommended that anyone with hepatitis B should tell their doctors or dentist.

It is also advised that you take precautions to avoid spreading the disease through the exchange of body fluids with sexual partners.

Some people with chronic hepatitis B may need antiviral medications to suppress the virus and prevent further damage to their liver. If you have chronic hepatitis B, you should see a doctor even if you have no symptoms. Your doctor will order blood tests to check if you have high or low levels of the virus and if you have mild or severe

liver damage, which will help determine if you should take antiviral medications. FDA approved treatments for hepatitis B include: interferon alfa-2b, pegylated interferon alfa-2a, lamivudine, adefovir dipivoxil, and entecavir.

Everyone with chronic hepatitis B should see a doctor and have blood tests regularly to monitor the level of the virus and severity of liver damage. Your doctor may also order tests to see if you have early stage liver cancer.

## What is the best way to prevent hepatitis B?

Vaccination is the best way to prevent hepatitis B because it gives you long term immunity. The hepatitis B vaccine is given in three doses. The first two doses are given a month apart; the final dose is given about six months later. Vaccination is recommended for:

- ✚ All newborns, infants, children and teenagers
- ✚ Health care and emergency workers
- ✚ Hemodialysis patients
- ✚ Patients with chronic liver disease
- ✚ Military personnel
- ✚ Morticians and embalmers
- ✚ Patients and staff at institutions for the developmentally challenged
- ✚ Prison inmates
- ✚ People with multiple sexual partners
- ✚ Men who have sex with men
- ✚ Injection drug users
- ✚ Sexual partners and household members of people with hepatitis B
- ✚ International travelers who expect to have close contact with residents in countries or regions where there is a high rate of hepatitis B infection
- ✚ Members of ethnic or racial groups with a high rate of hepatitis B infection (including Asian Americans, African Americans, Latino Americans, Native Americans and Alaskan Natives)