Hepatitis B

What is Hepatitis B?

- It is an infection of the liver caused by the Hepatitis B Virus (HBV); the virus is in the blood and body fluids such as semen, vaginal secretions and a very small amount in saliva
- The infection is usually a short illness (less than 6 months) in adults; only 5% of adults develop a lifelong (chronic) infection; chronic Hepatitis infections can cause liver disease, liver failure and in some cases liver cancer
- In children the infection has a much higher chance of becoming chronic (up to 90% in infants)

Signs and Symptoms

- 50% of adults have no symptoms at all
- Symptoms can appear two weeks to six months after you get the virus
- Symptoms include:
  - Headache
  - Nausea
  - Vomiting
  - Poor Appetite
  - Jaundice (yellowing of eyes and skin)
  - Dark tea-coloured urine (pee)
  - Light coloured bowel movements

Is Hepatitis B Contagious?

- YES! As long as you carry the virus, you can infect others
- The virus is mostly spread by blood to blood contact and sexual contact

How do I know if I have it?

- Get your blood tested for the Hepatitis B virus
- Your doctor may need to perform blood tests to see if you will have a life-long infection
- All new Hepatitis B patients should be re-tested 6 months after their first test; talk to your doctor about testing

How is Hepatitis B Spread?

- The virus is spread through contact such as:
  - Unprotected oral, vaginal and anal sex
  - Sharing needles or syringes; sharing other drug-using equipment (e.g. needles, straws, pipes, spoons, bills, water, cooker, cotton, etc.)
  - Infected mother to baby at birth
  - Un-safe tattoos, body piercing, body modification, or acupuncture
  - Having invasive medical or dental procedures, blood transfusion or vaccinations in country with a high Hepatitis B rate
  - Sharing personal items (toothbrushes, razors, manicure/pedicure tools) that might have infected blood on them (Hepatitis B can live up to 7 days outside the body)
  - Cleaning up or touching someone else’s blood without latex / nitrile gloves on
  - Fighting (if one person is infected and their blood mixes with yours)
  - Accidental needle-stick injury or massive blood exposure with non-intact skin
- Hepatitis B is not spread by:
  - Coughing
  - Sharing food or dishes
  - Touching doorknobs; touching toilet seats
  - Hot tubs, saunas or swimming pools
  - Casual contact: shaking hands, hugging or kissing
Hepatitis B

What can Hepatitis B do to me?

- Most adults (90%) get rid of the virus and no longer pass it to others; a small number die (less than 1%); others (9%) will become carriers of the virus and be able to pass it on to others.
- Most people with chronic Hepatitis B will remain healthy; about 25% may eventually get cirrhosis (scarring of the liver), liver failure, and liver cancer.

Can Hepatitis B be Treated?

- If you have been exposed to the Hepatitis B virus in the last 7 days, you can get an injection of Hepatitis B immune globulin that may prevent you from getting the infection.
- There is no treatment for acute Hepatitis B.
- Treatment is available for chronic Hepatitis B; these treatments do not cure Hepatitis B but can help prevent liver damage; a specialist can decide if treatment is the best choice for you and when you should start treatment.

What should I do if I have Hepatitis B?

- Get regular medical care with blood work every 6-12 months to check your liver function.
- Avoid alcohol and smoking as it can speed up liver damage.
- Talk to your health care provider or pharmacist before taking over-the-counter medication, prescription medication and herbal products because some treatments can be harmful to your liver.
- Hepatitis A vaccine can be provided at no cost from your health care provider through the Public Health Department; this helps protect your body from other Hepatitis viruses.
- Make sure your household members and sexual partners have been tested; they should also be vaccinated if they are not already immune; the vaccine can be provided at no cost from your health care provider through the Public Health Department.

What can be done to Reduce the Spread of Hepatitis B?

- If you don’t know if you are infected – Get Tested!
- Get Vaccinated! There is a vaccine to prevent Hepatitis B.
- Use a condom every time! If you have Hepatitis B, tell your partners and have them tested.
- Screening of all pregnant women.
- Don’t share needles, straws, pipes, spoons, bills, water or any drug-related equipment, Not Even Once! If you use injection or inhalation drugs, call Public Health at (905) 546-4276 for information on harm reduction strategies and the needle exchange program.
- Don’t share toothbrushes, razors, manicure equipment or any other ordinary personal item that could be contaminated with your blood.
- Don’t touch anybody else’s blood without wearing latex / nitrile gloves.

If you have any questions, please contact the Infectious Disease Program
905-546-2063

References:
Adapted from: [www.cdc.gov](http://www.cdc.gov) website Hepatitis B Fact Sheet (Last updated June 2016) Canadian Liver Foundation Information Sheet 2016