

2014-05-09

Hepatitis B

Patient information and rules of conduct. County Medical Officers' infection prevention sheet.

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a viral infection that attacks the liver and is primarily transmitted via blood and sexual intercourse. Hepatitis B is a global health problem and is extremely common in certain countries. Approximately half of all adults who are infected do not experience any symptoms. Symptoms of acute hepatitis B include nausea, poor appetite, fatigue, diffuse abdominal pain, pain throughout the body, and fever. Additional symptoms are itching and yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice). Most adults who are infected recover and are completely rid of the virus within a few months. Children who are infected are at a greater risk of developing a long-term (chronic) infection. Individuals with chronic infection are infectious and could develop serious liver damage over time. Such individuals should therefore have regular contact with their doctor to monitor whether they require treatment to reduce the risk of the infection damaging the liver. Doctor visits and any treatment are free of charge. There is a hepatitis B vaccine that can be administered both before injection and within 48 hours of being infected.

Routes of transmission

Hepatitis B can be transmitted through infectious blood coming into contact with the mucous membrane or damaged skin. Hepatitis B is also be transmitted sexually, whereby the risk of infection is great with all forms of intercourse/sexual contact. Transmission is also possible through close contact within the family. An infected woman can pass on the infection to her baby during birth. Sharing needles and other drug-injection equipment with a person infected with hepatitis B puts you at huge risk of becoming infected.

Transmission of the disease can be effectively prevented through vaccination. People in your family and close circles (sexual partners) who require vaccination will be offered this free of charge.

When is hepatitis B not infectious?

Hepatitis B cannot be passed on by hugging or kissing, or through tears. Faeces, urine, vomit or catarrh containing no blood are not infectious either. Blood coming into contact with undamaged skin does not present a risk of infection.

Professional activities

Infection with hepatitis B will not normally result in restrictions to your professional activities or studies.

However, you may be affected by restrictions in respect of your work, practice or participation in other activities if there is a risk of transmitting the infection.

Pregnancy and childbirth

An infected woman can pass on the infection to her baby during birth. All pregnant women are therefore offered hepatitis B testing at the maternity centre. To prevent the newborn baby from being infected with hepatitis B, vaccination begins immediately after birth.

Condoms for oral, vaginal or anal sex

Condoms are good protection against hepatitis B and other sexually transmitted diseases and should be used throughout the entire session of sex if your partner is not immune to hepatitis B (previously had the disease or was vaccinated against it). It is reasonable to assume that femidoms (female condoms) will also work, but this method has not been evaluated scientifically. The same can be said for use of dental dams for oral sex. Regardless of which type of protection is chosen, it must be worn throughout the entire session of sex/intimate contact.

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Contact tracing

It is important to find others who may have been infected and could pass it on. For this reason, contact tracing is performed. With contact tracing, you have to name the people who may have infected you – or whom you may have infected – to a responsible contact tracing officer. You are obliged to participate in contact tracing. Your identity will not be released to the people contacted.

Hygiene advice which you should follow so as not to infect anyone else

- Take care to bandage even small wounds.
- Anyone helping you with dressing wounds must wear plastic gloves.
- Pack bloodstained equipment carefully before discarding it.
- Clothing stained with blood must be machine-washed.
- Specks of blood on the floor, for example, must be cleaned up using single-use materials which are then discarded. Then wash thoroughly with water and detergent.

Rules of conduct which you should follow so as not to infect anyone else

- You must attend the follow-up visits and tests which your treating doctor considers necessary.
- When you require medical or dental care, you must provide notification indicating that your blood is infectious.
- You must give notice that your blood is infectious if getting a tattoo, your ears or any other body part pierced, or any other treatment that could involve your skin bleeding.
- Notify your treating doctor if you have a partner or family member who may require the hepatitis B vaccine.
- Before sexual intercourse/other intimate contact, you are obliged to inform your partner that you have hepatitis B. This applies to all forms of sexual contact/activities. You must inform of your hepatitis B even if you plan to use a condom/femidom/dental dam.
- If your partner is not immune to hepatitis B (previously had the disease or was vaccinated against it), the following applies: Condoms must be worn throughout the entire session in the event of sex where the penis is inserted in the vagina, the rectum or the mouth.
- If anyone gets your blood in a wound, the eyes, nose or mouth, flush immediately with water. You must inform the person that your blood is infected with hepatitis B and that he/she must immediately contact his/her medical centre, nearest infectious disease clinic or 1177/Vårdguiden to determine whether a free vaccination is in order.
- Do not share toilet items such as razors or toothbrushes with other people.
- If you inject drugs, you must have your own syringes and needles and not let other people use them. Do not share mixing cups or other accessories. The items you use for injecting drugs must be stored so that they do not place others at risk of infection.
- You must not donate blood, sperm, eggs, organs or tissue for transplantation.

Hepatitis B is considered a public health hazard according to the Swedish Communicable Diseases Act. You are therefore obliged to follow the rules of conduct you receive from your doctor. You may request reassessment of the rules of conduct by the County Medical Officer in your county.