

# HEPATITIS B

**Hepatitis B is a potentially life-threatening liver infection caused by the Hepatitis B virus (HBV). Prevalence of Hepatitis B infections varies a lot in different parts of world.**

## KEY FACTS

Hepatitis B:

- is a viral infection that attacks the liver and can cause both acute and chronic disease;
- is commonly transmitted from mother to child during birth and delivery, through sexual contact as well as contact with blood or other body fluids;
- is not spread by kissing, holding hands, hugging, coughing, sneezing or sharing crockery and utensils;
- in 2015, resulted in an estimated 887,000 deaths, mostly from cirrhosis and hepatocellular carcinoma (i.e. primary liver cancer);
- is estimated to have infected 350 million people worldwide and most are unaware of their infection;
- a safe and effective vaccine that offers a 98-100% protection against hepatitis B is available;
- has no cure, but there are several treatments that can help with managing symptoms and reducing the risk of long-term health problems, such as cirrhosis.

## HEALTH RISKS

- Hepatitis B is a global public health threat and the world's most common serious liver infection. It is up to 100 times more infectious than the HIV/AIDS virus. It is also the primary cause of liver cancer also known as hepatocellular carcinoma.



- Most people infected with Hepatitis B in adulthood do not experience obvious symptoms and are able to fight off the virus and fully recover within 1 to 3 months. Only less than 5% will develop chronic infections.
- In children, it often persists for years and may eventually cause serious liver damage; in fact, 80-90% of infants infected during the first year of life develop chronic infections.

## SYMPTOMS

Most people do not experience any symptoms when newly infected. However, some people have acute illness with symptoms that last several weeks. Symptoms of Hepatitis B include:

- flu-like symptoms, including tiredness, a fever, and general aches and pains
- loss of appetite
- abdominal pain
- dark colored urine
- diarrhoea
- yellowing of the skin and eyes (jaundice).

## TREATMENT

- There is no specific treatment for acute Hepatitis B. Therefore, care is aimed at maintaining comfort and adequate nutritional balance, including replacement of fluids lost from vomiting and diarrhoea.
- Most important is the avoidance of unnecessary medications. Acetaminophen/ Paracetamol and medication against vomiting should not be given.
- Chronic Hepatitis B infection can be treated with medicines, including oral antiviral agents. Treatment can slow the progression of cirrhosis, reduce incidence of liver cancer and improve long-term survival. Only a proportion (estimates vary from 10% to 40% depending on setting and eligibility criteria) of people with chronic Hepatitis B infection will require treatment.

## PREVENTION

- A safe and effective vaccine that offers a 98-100% protection against Hepatitis B is the mainstay of prevention.
- The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommend that all infants receive the Hepatitis B vaccine as soon as possible after birth, preferably within 24 hours.
- Implementation of blood safety strategies, including quality-assured screening of all donated blood and blood components used for transfusion, can prevent transmission of Hepatitis B infection.
- Safer sex practices, including minimizing the number of partners and correct and consistent use of condoms can also protect against transmission.

### Additional health information to transport workers who travels in between countries

Hepatitis B infection rate varies in different parts of the world. Many transport workers travel beyond national boundaries and their working condition can put them at higher risk.

You should seriously consider getting the Hepatitis B vaccine for a lifetime protection against a preventable chronic liver disease. Three doses are generally required to complete the Hepatitis B vaccine series. First shot at any given time; second shot – at least one month after the first shot. In addition, the third shot at least 4 months after the first shot. You **do not** need to restart the Hepatitis B vaccine series if you miss any of the shots.

As medical advancement is always happening the ITF will periodically update this information, as necessary. You can also keep yourself updated on Hepatitis B infection from WHO website at: <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/hepatitis-b>



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