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## What is Hepatitis B?

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Hepatitis B is a virus (germ) that can cause an infection of the liver. Symptoms include:

- ❖ Nausea and vomiting
- ❖ Loss of appetite
- ❖ Tummy pain
- ❖ Aching joints and tiredness
- ❖ Fever
- ❖ Jaundice - yellowing of skin and the whites of the eyes, dark urine and pale
- ❖ Coloured stools/motions

Many people have no symptoms at all, or will feel only mildly unwell. Most people will recover completely, getting rid of the virus from their bodies. Less than one in ten people will go on to become carriers. A few carriers may go on to develop serious, long-term liver trouble like cirrhosis (scarring) of the liver or occasionally liver cancer.

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## Who can I get infected?

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There are three main ways that the infection is spread:

1. A pregnant woman with hepatitis B may pass the virus on to her child
2. From sharing needles and other injecting equipment, tattoo & body piercing equipment, razors, toothbrushes or any other article contaminated with infected blood
3. Unprotected sexual intercourse (without a condom)

The virus is not spread by normal day to day contact and activities such as coughing, sneezing, hugging, holding hands, sharing cups or cutlery.

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## What should I do to reduce my risk?

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Because you are in close contact with someone who has hepatitis B you are advised to see your GP or practice nurse or, if appropriate the Sexual Health Clinic or Community Drugs Team, especially if you inject drugs and share injecting equipment or have had unprotected sex. There is a simple blood test that can detect hepatitis B - remember you may have no clear symptoms.

A vaccine is available to anyone who may be at risk of hepatitis B. You may want to contact your GP and talk to them about this. Most people become fully protected once they have had a course of 3 injections. This may take several months before protection is complete.

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## What are the most important things to do to prevent hepatitis B?

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- ❖ Practice safer sex (using a condom), especially if you change partners regularly
- ❖ Do not share injecting equipment, toothbrushes, razors or nail clippers
- ❖ Always go to a place you can trust for tattooing, body piercing and ask for a new unused sterile needle
- ❖ Make sure you cover all cuts and grazes with waterproof plasters, especially on your hands
- ❖ Get vaccinated if advised by a medical professional

### Need further advice or information?

- ❖ NHS Inform [www.nhsinform.co.uk](http://www.nhsinform.co.uk)
- ❖ NHS24 ☎ 111 [www.nhs24.co.uk](http://www.nhs24.co.uk)
- ❖ [www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk](http://www.nhsborders.scot.nhs.uk)
- ❖ Local health clinic or GP

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**June 2014**