

# What You Need to Know About Hepatitis B

*This handout gives you key information on chronic hepatitis B. It will help you understand why getting screened for hepatitis B infection is important. You will also learn that if you do have chronic hepatitis B, effective treatments are available for it. If you do not have hepatitis B infection, you can get vaccinated, so that you do not have to worry about getting it.*

## What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a type of virus that infects the liver. People who have long-term infection with hepatitis B, called chronic hepatitis B, can develop serious liver disease, including liver cancer and cirrhosis.

### KEY POINT!

*It is important to know that effective and safe treatments are available that can help prevent serious liver disease in patients who have chronic hepatitis B.*

## Why should I get screened?

- Most people who have chronic hepatitis B do not know it. This is because chronic hepatitis B usually does not cause any symptoms until a person has had it for years, sometimes decades
- Asian Americans are at a greater risk for having hepatitis B infection. In fact, chronic hepatitis B is a main cause of liver cancer in Asian Americans
- Getting screened is easy. If screening shows that you are at risk for hepatitis B infection, we will help you get tested to find out whether or not you have it

## What is involved in testing for hepatitis B infection?

- If screening shows that you are at risk for hepatitis B infection, your health care provider will order a simple blood test. Your provider will need to take a sample of your blood for the test

## How hepatitis B infection is spread

Hepatitis B infection can only be spread through contact with infected blood or body secretions. Women with hepatitis B infection can pass the virus to their infants during birth. This is how most Asian Americans with hepatitis B infection got the virus.

## You CAN also get hepatitis B infection by:

- Touching the blood or sores of an infected person
- Having sex with an infected person without using a condom
- Sharing razors, toothbrushes, or other personal items with an infected person
- Sharing needles or syringes used to inject drugs
- Using unsterilized needles or equipment for tattoos, body piercings, or acupuncture

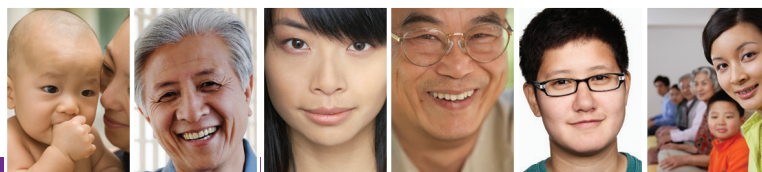
## Hepatitis B infection is NOT spread through:

- Casual contact, for example, shaking hands or hugging
- Coughing or sneezing
- Breastfeeding (unless nipples are cracked or bleeding)
- Sharing eating utensils

- The blood-test results will tell your health care provider whether or not you have been infected with hepatitis B. The blood test can also tell whether or not you need to get vaccinated against hepatitis B infection

## What if I do not have hepatitis B infection?

- If your blood test shows that you do not have hepatitis B infection and you are not already immune to it, then you will need to be vaccinated. The hepatitis B vaccine will protect you from getting infected with hepatitis B in the future
- If your blood test shows that you did have hepatitis B infection at some time in the past but your body fought off the infection and you are now immune to it, then nothing more will need to be done. You do not need to get vaccinated



## What is involved in getting vaccinated?

- The hepatitis B vaccine requires 3 doses given within 6 months. Getting all 3 doses will give you the highest level of protection against hepatitis B infection. But if for some reason this is not possible, talk to your health care provider. An alternative vaccine schedule may work for you
- You may be wondering what happens if you miss a vaccine dose for some reason. Do not worry; you do not have to start from the beginning. You just have to get the remaining shots you need

### KEY POINT!

*The hepatitis B vaccine is safe and effective. Since 1982, more than 1 billion doses of the vaccine have been given around the world. You cannot get hepatitis B infection from the vaccine. Usually, the most you may feel is some soreness where you got the shot.*

## What if I have hepatitis B infection?

- If your blood test shows that you have hepatitis B infection, your health care provider will talk with you about the best way for you to stay healthy and when you should start treatment. Your provider may run additional tests to get a better idea of how your liver is working and how active the hepatitis B virus is in your liver
- Your health care provider may also want you to see another doctor who specializes in treating chronic hepatitis B

### KEY POINT!

*It is important to know that most people with hepatitis B infection don't need treatment right away. But they do need to see their health care provider regularly for checkups. This is the best way to detect any changes in their condition.*

## What treatment is available if I have hepatitis B infection?

- We have safe and effective treatments for hepatitis B infection. The treatments help control the virus and help protect your liver from liver cancer, cirrhosis, or other damage. There are 7 approved treatments available in the United States
- When it is time to consider treatment, your health care provider will discuss the different options with you, so that you can decide together which approach will work best for you. Your provider will tell you more about treatment and how often you need to come in for appointments
- It is important to keep appointments with your health care provider even though you feel well. Your provider needs to see you periodically to help you stay healthy

## If I have hepatitis B infection, how can I protect my family?

- Your family members and people who live with you need to get tested for hepatitis B infection and get vaccinated if they are not immune. The best protection against hepatitis B infection is to get vaccinated
- Also, if you have chronic hepatitis B, there are some things you need to do to prevent spreading the hepatitis B virus to your family members or people who live with you:
  - Cover open cuts and scratches with a bandage
  - Do not share personal items, for example, toothbrushes or razors
  - Clean blood spills with bleach or detergent
  - Do not donate blood, organs, or semen
  - Have sexual contacts vaccinated
  - Use barrier protection during sexual intercourse if your partner is not vaccinated or immune
- But there are no other limits on the things you can do. You can still play contact sports and share food, water, and utensils. You can participate in all types of social activities involving casual contact