

## How can you prevent HBV infection?

- ◆ **Immunisation:** Only vaccination gives real protection against Hepatitis B. This involves 3 injections given over a period of 3-6 months. The vaccine is given to children in schools.
- ◆ **People at risk:** are given the vaccine for free
- ◆ **Avoid sharing of needles,** syringes, filters or mixing spoons for drug use
- ◆ **Avoid sharing of shaving equipment, toothbrushes,** or anything else that may be contaminated with infected blood
- ◆ **Avoid use of non-sterilised equipment:** for tattooing, acupuncture or body piercing
- ◆ **Use condoms:** Reduces the risk of transmission during sexual activity

## Where can you get help?

- ◆ Consult your family doctor (GP)
- ◆ **GU (Genitourinary) Clinic**  
For an appointment call **21 227 981**. **Confidentiality is guaranteed**
- ◆ Contact the **Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Directorate** on **2326 6000**.

“*Sexual health is more than freedom from sexual disease... Sexual health is non-exploitive and respectful of self and others... is dependent upon an individual's well-being and sense of self-esteem. Sexual health requires trust, honesty, and communication.*”

**Eli Coleman,**  
Director of Program in Human Sexuality,  
University of Minnesota



**Ministry for Health, the Elderly and Community Care**



**Health Promotion & Disease Prevention Directorate**

5B, The Emporium, C. De Brockdorff Str., Msida MSD 1421 Malta.  
Tel: 2326 6000, Fax: 2326 6104, [www.sahha.gov.mt](http://www.sahha.gov.mt)

# Hepatitis B



**HBV**  
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There are more than 350 million people infected with Hepatitis B worldwide. This leaflet provides information about Hepatitis B, its mode of transmission and ways to prevent it.

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**HBV - HCV - HIV**

## What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B (HBV) is a viral infection that causes an inflammation and swelling of the liver.

## How is Hepatitis B transmitted?

HBV is transmitted through the exchange of body fluids with an infected person. It is up to 100 times more infectious than HIV.

### Ways you can become infected with HBV:

- ◆ **Unprotected sexual intercourse with an infected person:** Sexual activities without a condom carry the risk of HBV infection. (Condom use still carries some risk but it reduces it substantially)
- ◆ **Contact with an infected person's blood:** If sufficient infected blood enters one's body, HBV is likely to be transmitted
- ◆ **Use of infected blood products:** such as injecting drugs with needles that were used by an infected person and use of non-sterilised equipment for tattooing, acupuncture or body piercing
- ◆ **Sharing of shaving equipment and toothbrushes:** The virus can be found in dried up blood too
- ◆ **From mother to child:** especially during delivery

A person with Hepatitis B is most infectious before they start showing any symptoms.

You **CANNOT** get infected with HBV through: sneezing, coughing, hugging.

## What are the signs and symptoms of HBV?

You may experience mild symptoms or no symptoms at all and still be infected with the virus. When symptoms do appear, they may include:

- ◆ flu-like illness
- ◆ nausea, vomiting and diarrhoea
- ◆ loss of appetite
- ◆ itchy skin
- ◆ exhaustion
- ◆ aches and pains
- ◆ jaundice (yellow skin and whites of eyes, darker yellow urine and pale faeces)

**Full recovery is possible.** Once recovered from HBV you will stop being infectious so you cannot transmit it to others...and you will not be infected again.

However, between 2% - 10% of persons infected become **chronic carriers**. This increases the risk of developing liver cirrhosis and liver cancer and remain infectious.

## How is HBV treated?

For mild symptoms – no treatment required. The immune system usually fights off the virus after a few months.

For chronic symptoms – antiviral medication to help prevent liver damage. Treatment usually lasts 6 months.

All infected persons should have **regular blood tests and physical check-ups** to monitor the virus, even if they are not receiving treatment.

### Advised to:

- ◆ avoid alcohol
- ◆ get plenty of rest
- ◆ and eat a healthy diet.

Compiled by Janice Magro and Bernardette Bonello  
Design by Stefan Attard

