

Hepatitis B

Information for patients from the Infection Prevention and Control Team

What is Hepatitis B?

Hepatitis is a general term referring to inflammation of the liver. It can be caused by many things such as drugs, chemicals, and viruses. At present, there are five different types of virus which are known to cause Hepatitis, and Hepatitis B is one of them. They work by entering the body and then attacking the liver, causing inflammation and destruction of the liver cells.

What are the symptoms of Hepatitis B?

Many people have no symptoms while others have a flu-like illness including a sore throat, tiredness, joint pains, and a loss of appetite. Other symptoms may include nausea (feeling sick) and vomiting. Sometimes there can be abdominal (tummy) discomfort and symptoms often progress to jaundice (a yellow appearance).

The incubation period (the time between becoming infected and becoming ill) is between one and six months (usually three months). Most people (about 95 people in every 100) will recover fully, but this can take up to six months or even longer. A small number of people develop a more severe form of chronic (long-term) illness.

Is there any treatment?

There is no specific treatment for the actual disease. Your doctor will advise you to get plenty of rest, eat healthily, and avoid alcohol.

How long will I be infectious?

Around one in four people who are infected will become carriers of the virus, which means they will be infectious to others, even after they have recovered from the disease.

How is Hepatitis B transmitted from person to person?

Hepatitis B is found in all of the body fluids of an infected person, including blood, serum, saliva, breast milk, and urine. For this reason, the virus can be transmitted through sex, injection or puncture of the skin with contaminated needles, and the spillage of bodily fluids into open cuts and sores. It can also be transmitted from mother to baby during childbirth and breastfeeding.



How can I avoid becoming infected with Hepatitis B?

In the UK all blood donated is screened for Hepatitis B. There are precautions you can take to avoid becoming infected with Hepatitis B.

- Do not share needles.
- Cover cuts and grazes with a waterproof dressing/plaster.
- Wear protective clothing, plastic gloves, and aprons when carrying out activities where you come in to contact with body fluids.
- Wear a condom during sex.
- Dispose of sharp instruments such as needles safely, in specially designed containers which are strong enough not to be punctured.

Is there a vaccine?

Yes. Hepatitis B can be prevented. There is a safe and effective vaccine which people at risk of infection can have. It is given as three injections over six months.

Further Information

If you have any questions or concerns, please speak to either the nurse-in-charge of the ward or the matron. If they are unable to help you or you need further information, please contact a member of the Infection Prevention and Control Team on:

- **Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother (QEQM) Hospital**, Margate
Telephone: 01843 22 55 44 extension 725-3625
- **Kent and Canterbury Hospital**, Canterbury
Telephone: 01227 86 40 49
- **William Harvey Hospital**, Ashford
Telephone: 01233 63 33 31 extension 723-8202 or 723-8198

This leaflet has been produced with and for patients

If you would like this information in **another language, audio, Braille, Easy Read, or large print** please ask a member of staff. You can ask someone to contact us on your behalf.

Any complaints, comments, concerns, or compliments please speak to your doctor or nurse, or contact the Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) on 01227 78 31 45, or email ekh-tr.pals@nhs.net

Patients should not bring in large sums of money or valuables into hospital. Please note that East Kent Hospitals accepts no responsibility for the loss or damage to personal property, unless the property had been handed in to Trust staff for safe-keeping.

Further patient leaflets are available via the East Kent Hospitals web site www.ekhufft.nhs.uk/patientinformation