

Remember:

- Hepatitis B is a serious disease but it can be prevented.
- It is spread by coming in contact with blood or body fluids of an infected person.
- Vaccination and good hygiene can protect you from hepatitis B.

Hepatitis B

Information for people with an intellectual disability, their families and carers



How can I learn more?

Useful information on hepatitis B can be found from the following sources:

- Your family doctor
- Local public health department of the HSE

You can get other information and leaflets about hepatitis B on the following websites

- www.hpsc.ie
- www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hbv
- www.who.int
- www.immunisation.ie
- www.emitoolkit.ie



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Authors: Hepatitis Working Group of the Public Health Medicine Communicable Disease Group, Departments of Public Health and Health Protection Surveillance Centre, Health Service Executive.



What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a viral disease which affects the liver. It can make you seriously ill. It can cause chronic liver disease, cirrhosis or cancer and is sometimes fatal.

There is a vaccine which can protect you against hepatitis B. People who attend or work in a service for those with an intellectual disability have a higher risk of hepatitis B. If you attend or work in such a service, you should be vaccinated against hepatitis B. This includes both residential and day services.

What is chronic hepatitis B infection?

Some people who get hepatitis B continue to carry the virus in their blood even though they appear well. This is called chronic hepatitis B infection and people who have it are called 'carriers'.

Some people with chronic hepatitis B infection go on to develop serious liver disease. People with chronic hepatitis B infection may not be ill but they can pass the virus on to other people without knowing. People infected in this way can become ill with hepatitis B.

How is it spread?

Hepatitis B is spread by exposure to the blood or body fluids of an infected person. You can catch hepatitis B if you:

- Come in contact with bleeding sores or cuts of an infected person.
- Share razors, toothbrushes, washcloths, towels, nail clippers or anything that might have blood or other body fluids on them.
- Are the child of person with chronic hepatitis B infection.
- Are a health care worker or other person exposed to infected blood or body fluids.
- Use unsterilised needles for body piercing, tattooing, acupuncture, electrolysis, or if you have been injected with a used needle.

- Have sex with a person carrying hepatitis B.
- Share needles or other equipment when injecting drugs.

In some cases, a definite source of infection is never identified.

You cannot get hepatitis B by

- **Sneezing or coughing**
- **Kissing or hugging**
- **Breastfeeding**
- **Food or water**
- **Sharing dishes or glasses**
- **Casual contact (such as at work)**

How can I protect myself against hepatitis B?

- Hepatitis B vaccine is a safe, effective vaccine and your best protection. It is recommended for
 - Those with an intellectual disability attending centres such as daycare facilities, special schools and other units.
 - Staff and carers in centres for those with an intellectual disability (including daycare facilities, special schools and other centres).
- The vaccine is given in a course of three injections. After three injections, a blood test may sometimes be taken to check if you are now protected. Side effects may be a sore arm and redness where you were injected.
- If you are pregnant or wish to become pregnant it is best to discuss this before getting vaccinated.
- Do not touch blood or body fluids, or any tissues that have been soiled with these, of someone who has hepatitis B infection.

- If you are exposed to the blood of someone with hepatitis B infection and have not been protected against the infection by vaccination, you can be protected from hepatitis B if you get treatment quickly. You should go to your doctor or Emergency Department and say you have been in contact with hepatitis B. You will get an injection of hepatitis B immunoglobulin (HBIG) and start the hepatitis B vaccine course.
- Do not share toothbrushes, razors, needles, nail files, nail clippers, nail scissors, washcloths or towels with someone who has hepatitis B infection.
- If you inject drugs, stop injecting or get into a rehab program. Never share drugs, needles, syringes, cotton, water or rinse cups.
- Use condoms

The vaccine

- Hepatitis B vaccine is a safe, effective vaccine and the best way to protect yourself.
- The vaccine is usually given in a course of three injections - at your first clinic visit, one month later and six months after the first injection.
- After three injections, a blood test may sometimes be taken to check if you are now protected.
- Some people will need an extra dose(s) of the vaccine. A very small number of people will not respond to the vaccine and are not protected.
- Side effects of the vaccine may be a sore arm and redness where you have been injected.
- If you are pregnant or planning a pregnancy, talk to your doctor before getting the vaccine.
- You cannot get hepatitis B from the vaccine.

GET VACCINATED!