

Bottom line.

There are millions of people walking around with nasty infectious diseases. Although it's sensible to protect yourself around this person you've learned has hepatitis B, it's wiser to assume *everyone* has an infectious disease. *Including yourself.* Don't forget the number of people who don't even know they're infected. Use standard precautions and treat everyone's blood and body fluid as if it was infected with something.

This can sound scary and overwhelming, but after giving it some thought, you'll start to make it a habit and soon it will seem a simple matter of common sense. Please contact us if you have any questions or concerns. We'll do our best to help you.

One more thing: An individual's medical information is considered to be private. Please remember that the person who handed you this brochure has shared something very personal and would like for you to respect her/his privacy.



PO Box 5666
Vancouver, WA 98668
360.695.0293 voice
360.695.6941 fax
877.55.PKIDS toll free
www.pkids.org
pkids@pkids.org

SOMEONE YOU KNOW HAS HEPATITIS B

Are you in danger?



One-third of the world's population has had or does have hepatitis B. That's about two billion people. When you add other chronic, viral infectious diseases like HIV/AIDS, herpes, CMV, and the other chronic forms of hepatitis, the number of people who have had or currently live with one of these diseases gets closer to half the global population. That's a lot of people.

From 40 to 90 percent of these folks don't know they have an infectious disease, and of those who do know, most keep the information within the family. As you learn about hepatitis B and how to protect yourself against it, don't forget to use what you learn with all people in all situations. You don't know who might be infected - and sometimes neither do they!

What is hepatitis B?

Hepatitis B is a virus which makes the liver sick. It can cause cirrhosis, which scars the liver and makes it not work well, it can cause liver cancer, and even death. It can also be in the body but not do much, allowing the person infected to live a long and healthy life.

How infectious is it?

When infected moms give birth, their babies have a 90 percent chance of becoming chronically infected, meaning that it's liable to stay with them for a long time - probably a lifetime.

When a baby is born with hepatitis B in her/his body, her/his immune system doesn't know that the virus isn't supposed to be there, and allows it to grow without a fight. As a person ages, the immune system matures and starts fighting diseases when they try to set up shop in the body. If a child is infected with hepatitis B at the age of five, her/his body has a 50 percent chance of fighting it off. This trend continues until, as grownups, people have a 90 percent chance of fighting off the infection.

Hepatitis B is considered 100 times more infectious than HIV, the virus that causes AIDS. This means that if you put two slides under an electron microscope, one with a drop of blood infected with hepatitis B and one with a drop of blood infected with HIV, you'll see a lot more hepatitis B virus swimming in its drop of blood than HIV in its drop of blood. This makes it easier to get hepatitis B.

How do people get infected?

The hepatitis B virus is found in blood and body fluids including semen, vaginal secretions, and saliva. It's important to remember that although the virus might be detectable in saliva, it's not an easy way to get infected. Generally, the infected person would have to bite you and break your skin, sending the saliva directly into your blood, or you would have to bite them and get their blood into your mouth and on your gums.

Blood-to-blood contact is pretty much a guarantee of becoming infected. This virus can live for several days on surfaces like razor blades, toothbrushes, needles/syringes, fingernail files and clippers, and other personal grooming tools that might cause some bleeding. Never use another person's personal things because you might nick yourself and create an opening on your skin for their blood to enter. Don't forget that hepatitis isn't the only virus that can hang around and cause problems.

Getting an infected person's blood or body fluids in your nose, on your gums, or around your eyeballs where the mucous membranes are thin is a good way to become infected. Having sex without using a condom virtually guarantees infection.

How do we prevent infection?

There's a vaccine for hepatitis B. Go to your healthcare provider and get vaccinated. Don't do this because you just found out someone you spend time around has hepatitis B. Do it because there may be people you work with, go to school with, get medical care from, go on dates with, and jostle everyday on the sidewalk who have hepatitis B.

Many times the clinic will test you before going through with the vaccination to see if you've been infected at some time in your life and are now immune. With a third of the world's population having been infected, it's not unreasonable to think you might be in that group.

Should you get in a wrestling match with the infected person and accidentally bite them, or do something else which will likely lead to your infection before you visit your clinic, you can still be pretty safe by going to the clinic or emergency room and getting an injection of hepatitis B immune globulin and the first dose of the vaccine series. This is what they do to babies just after they're born to infected moms to prevent the baby becoming infected. The reason babies continue to get infected is that not all pregnant women are tested for hepatitis B, so the babies aren't always started on appropriate treatment at birth.

If a person is bleeding and you don't have latex gloves, press a sanitary napkin over the wound, or use a folded piece of absorbent material like a towel and cover your hands with trash can liners or sandwich baggies. Wash your hands after changing a baby's diaper. If your hands have open wounds, exposing them to anyone's poop is a good way to get all sorts of infections. And, use a latex condom during sex!

