# Hepatitis B virus infection

Department of Infectious Diseases
Information for Patients

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## Introduction

- The word “hepatitis” means swelling (inflammation) of the liver. Hepatitis B virus is an infection which can cause hepatitis
- The virus is carried in the blood and other body fluids. You cannot usually tell how and when a person got it as people do not always feel unwell. We can tell if you have hepatitis B by doing a blood test
- Hepatitis B is a very common infection in certain parts of the world such as South-East Asia, India, Africa, the Middle and Far East and some parts of Europe
- Hepatitis B infection can be short-term (acute) or long-term (chronic). Most adults clear the virus within 6 months (acute infection) and need no treatment. If the infection lasts longer than 6 months, this is called chronic hepatitis B. This is usually lifelong and needs regular monitoring, and sometimes treatment

## How did I get hepatitis B?

- Passed on (transmission) from mother to child or from family in very early life
- Through unsafe medical practices, for example, dirty (unsterilised) medical equipment outside the UK
- Through close sexual contact with someone who has the virus
- Through unsafe blood transfusions outside the UK
- Through unsterilised tattoo or piercing equipment
- Through shared injecting drug equipment
- You cannot catch hepatitis B from hugging, kissing, sharing cups or cutlery or by using the same toilet with someone who has the infection

## What does hepatitis B do to your body?

- You may have hepatitis B without feeling unwell or having any liver damage. However, the virus can damage your liver over time
- In some people, hepatitis B can cause the liver to be swollen or become permanently damaged and scarred. Severe scarring is called cirrhosis. It can stop your liver working properly. It could, in some cases, lead to cancer of the liver

## What treatment is available?

- There are a few different treatments for hepatitis B. Your doctor will do blood tests and a scan of your liver (called a fibroscan) to decide if you need to start treatment
- You will be offered treatment if you have a high level of hepatitis B virus in your blood or if your liver is already damaged
- If you need treatment, this is usually a tablet taken once a day. At the moment there is no cure for hepatitis B, so most people need to keep taking this treatment long-term.
- Some people only have a small amount of virus in their blood so they will not have treatment straight away but will be kept under review.

## What happens once I have been diagnosed?

- You will be referred to a specialist doctor or specialist nurse in the hospital who will see you regularly. It is very important that you attend your appointments
- You should not share razors or toothbrushes and should tell your GP and dentist
- Your family members and other close contacts can have a blood test. If the test shows they do not have hepatitis B, they can have a very effective vaccine to protect them
- Looking after your liver can help:
    - eat a well-balanced diet
    - do not drink alcohol
    - stay physically active

## Where can I get more information?

- From your GP or specialist hospital doctor
- From the specialist Liver nurses on 0116 258 6679 (Monday to Friday 9am to 4pm)
- From Liver UK at www.liveruk.org

Health information and support is available at www.nhs.uk or call 111 for non-emergency medical advice

Visit www.uhleicester.nhs.uk for maps and information about visiting Leicester's Hospitals.

To give feedback about this information sheet, contact uhl-tr.informationforpatientsmailbox@nhs.net

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If you would like this information in another language or format such as EasyRead or Braille, please telephone 0116 250 2959 or email uhl-tr.equalitymailbox@nhs.net

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